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" **THE IMAGE OF AFRICA IN THE WORKS OF MARGARET LAURENCE:
A STUDY OF THE PROPHET'S CAMEL BELL, THIS SIDE JORDAN, AND
THE TOMORROW-TAMER "**

by

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**A Thesis Submitted In Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Master of Arts in
Literature**

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

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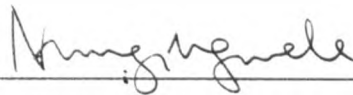
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my mother Rhoda Katui, my father Jacob Ngwele, and my elder brother Titus Ngwele, through whose unflagging sacrifice I was able to get education, and to make it my enduring heritage.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the image of Africa in three creative works by Canadian novelist, Margaret Laurence, namely The Prophet's Camel Bell, This Side Jordan, and The Tomorrow - Tamer. Concerned that Laurence's critics have tended to ignore her work that has African settings and African concerns while often over-reaching for her Canadian fiction, this study sets out to not only examine the writer's images and perception of Africa, but also to shed hitherto unshed critical light on the African works. It attempts to bridge the critical gap that scholars have created between Laurence's African and Canadian works.

Whereas many critics and reviewers have looked at Laurence's African works as apprentice writing which paved way for her Canadian fiction, this study goes out to acknowledge and explore the remarkable thematic and formal properties of these works. We expose Laurence's African works as uniquely accomplished and fully realized artistic pieces, which proclaim some of her most singular attributes as an artist. The study shows that it is these works which, more than any other, attest to the writer's ability to understand and sympathize with people across cultural boundaries, and affirm her humanism that transcends the insularity of race and region.

Laurence's African works are also examined against the background of the contemporary tradition of Western writers who often denigrated Africans and portrayed Africa as a place of gloom and despair. We endeavor to show that Laurence's African works, in various ways, present a positive and optimistic image of contemporary African society. In doing this, we also explore the writer's exposure and

condemnation of imperialism which she encountered during her sojourn in two African countries, and which she represents in the works through various characters and situations. Reflecting the works against the historical colonial context of their time, we show that Laurence makes a significant departure from the popular Western stereotypes towards Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. We show here how Laurence eschews the racist denigration of Africans prevailing at her time, and how this makes her works not only literary but also historical milestones.

In addition to the exposition on Laurence's image of Africa, this study explores the personal and literary background of the writer and highlights, perhaps in a way that no other research has done, how her African experiences shaped and informed her overall outlook to life and literary vision.

We also examine the concerns and achievements of her vast literary work, in which the writer emerges as a consummate artist and social commentator whose African and Canadian works form a seamless, universal vision of the human struggle for freedom. The study tries to place Africa in its due place as the germinal ground from which the writer sharpened her creative skills and learned to probe the nature of human freedom.

The study is fully conscious of the interdependence between form and content in literary art forms, and we therefore give as much attention to the works' relevance to the life they portray as to their constructional elements. The imperatives of form and issues of style which previous critics have raised on some of the works are addressed. The study employs a method of deep textual analysis in order to achieve its objectives.

INTRODUCTION

Margaret Laurence is one of the best known modern Canadian novelists, and like all famous writers, has attracted wide critical attention. However, most of this attention has focused on her five works set in Canada -- The Stone Angel, A Bird in the House, The Fire Dwellers, A Jest of God and The Diviners -- which collectively form her famous "Manawaka series." Critics have tended to ignore the other half of Laurence's work that comprises an equal number of books with African settings and African concerns. These are This Side Jordan, The Tomorrow - Tamer, The Prophet's Camel Bell, A Tree for Poverty and a collection of critical essays on West African artists, Long Drums and Cannons. Many critics and reviewers have perceived these African works as Laurence's apprentice writing. The little critical attention they have received therefore has been to highlight how they paved the way for her Canadian writing. In so doing, critics have failed to acknowledge the remarkable thematic and formal properties of these works.

It is therefore the aim of this thesis to focus on the African works as an attempt to bridge the critical gap that literary scholars have created between them and the Canadian works. The works to be examined are This Side Jordan, Laurence's first novel ever, and The Tomorrow Tamer, a collection of some of her finest short stories. Another of her African works, The Prophet's Camel Bell, inevitably falls into the scope of this thesis. This is because as the only autobiographical record of Laurence's years in Africa, The Prophet's Camel Bell consists a crucial documentation of the experiences that shaped and informed

her African fiction. Without reference to this work, it would be difficult to apprehend the motivation and some of the underlying issues of her fiction.

Although it is true that Laurence's Canadian works form the zenith of her creative output, literary scholars have failed to realize that her African fiction too has enormous artistic credit of its own. These works are important not only because they are well accomplished and fully realized artistic pieces, but what is more important, because they are the ones that proclaim Laurence's most singular attributes as an artist. It is these African works which, most of all, attest to the writer's ability to understand and sympathise with people across cultural boundaries, and her humanism that transcends the insularity of race and region.

If considered within the context of the historical colonial conditions of their time, these works also indicate a significant departure from the popular Western stereotypes towards Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. Laurence eschews the racist denigration of Africans prevailing at the time, and this makes her works significant and worthy of examination.

The core-term 'image' in 'image of Africa' needs clarification since in literary discourse it has a narrow meaning as well as a deeper and extensive application. In its narrow application, which is not the meaning implied in this thesis, image is quite simply a figure of speech, such as a simile or metaphor. It designates the concrete mental picture of an object created through vivid or graphic description, or the impression of likeness of an

object created through its comparison with another that shares its attributes. In The Health Guide to Literature, Bergman and Epstein see this image as "a group of words that records sense impression directly" (497). H.C. Holman in A Handbook to Literature variously refers to image as "a literal and concrete representation of a sensory experience or of an object that can be known by one or more of the senses" (223).

However, in its more extensive meaning, which is applied here, image means the general impression or conception of something -- such as country, people or culture -- formed when such impression is publicly expressed. Therefore by "the image" of Africa in Margaret Laurence's African fiction, this thesis seeks to identify and explore the impression or view of Africa that Laurence has created through her fiction. It is the contention of this thesis that Laurence's African fiction displays a profound grasp of the social imperatives that underlie and shape life in contemporary Africa.

The image of Africa in Laurence's African fiction reveals her as a humane and informed artist, something that appears to have evaded many years of critical scholarship, and which is therefore yet to be fully appreciated. It is the purpose of this thesis to bridge this gap in scholarship on Margaret Laurence, and at the same time contribute to the existing wealth of critical knowledge on her works.

Critical evaluation of Laurence's African works is important for a number of reasons. For one, it enables us to appreciate fully the writer's attitude towards Africa, and to understand

her position on the richly controversial issue of the European perception of Africa. Since ancient times, European imagination has held Africa as a strange land with weird human beings and beasts. Western literature on Africa provides a record of this fantasy. As a popular conception in Western literary discourse, Africa has been characterised as homogenous, static and savage.

Dorothy Hammond and Alter Jablow observe in The Myth of Africa, their analysis of the development of the British myth of Africa, that European writing on Africa is pervaded by ethnocentrism. They see ethnocentrism as implying that "all perception is made through one's values and beliefs", and further explain:

An ethnocentric point of view admits only one valid way of life. Cultures that differ from one's own are perceived as negotiations of that single set of values, rather than as expressions of other and different systems... Ethnocentricity... does not permit the possibility of alternative and perhaps equally valid ways of life... (15).

Hence European writers, especially those of the early colonial period, were conditioned by their values and habits such that they misinterpreted the cultures of other people as invalid. They also built a stock of stereotypes by which they condescendingly represented Africa.

Writing against a backdrop of such negative tradition, Laurence deserves a critical evaluation to establish whether she deviates from the denigrative Western stereotypes of Africa. It is important to find out how this writer depicts life and society in the unfamiliar African environment

Moreover, in their critique of European discourse on Africa, Afrocentric critics have often indiscriminately castigated Western writers as racist and imperialist, without recognizing that not all of them are equally biased against Africa. They have thus created a counter-stereotype of the Western writer as unduly biased and spuriously denigrative of Africa. To avoid this pitfall, it is important to examine writers on the individual light which one's work creates. This approach is even more important for Laurence who has won wide critical acclaim for her Canadian works, and who therefore should be able to stand up to scrutiny for her non-Canadian writing.

In her African works Laurence explores the lives of a people who are hardly familiar to her, and documents her unique experience with them. Yet, as a review of the critical literature on these works reveals, there has been no full-length study of the works to establish how well this task has been accomplished, or even what kind of experience informed this undertaking. Instead, these important works have been relegated to the status of appendages of Laurence's Canadian works. It is important to dispel this wrong impression by undertaking a full length study of the African works to ascertain their literary worth.

In addition to this, a lot has been said about Laurence's African experience, and especially of the import of this experience to her overall artistic insights. In his essay "Possessing the Land" published in The Canadian Imagination (Ed David Staines) George Woodcock

has argued that it is this African experience which sharpened the writer's sensitivity to her Canadian heritage, a sensitivity that has inspired five powerful and widely acclaimed works of art. Yet her African works, which are the most immediate products of this experience have never been studied seriously. It is therefore important to look at these works in their individual light rather than merely as antecedents of Laurence's Canadian works.

This study is justified further by the rather ambivalent position of "expatriate literature" on Africa. This literature, which can be defined as literature on Africa written by outsiders, occupies an ambiguous position. Never fully received in the mainstream of the regional literature of its authors, but at the same time only skirting the African, this literature has been neglected by scholars, perhaps because of its lack of a clear ownership. Laurence's African works belong to this "orphaned corpus". This study, though not exactly adopting it into the African mainstream, is important because it brings some of this literature into the intellectual limelight. Laurence's African works deserve this because of their artistic worth.

Before embarking on a review of the critical literature that touches on Laurence's African fiction, we must draw attention to the fact that it was difficult to secure all the relevant material for this purpose. Canadian literature is not yet popular locally, and for this reason background material is hard to come by. While this review has attempted to gather all the relevant available material on Laurence -- and it is quite considerable -- some significant items may have been missed out. However, this is unlikely to prejudice this thesis since

survey of a full bibliography on Laurence up to 1987¹ reveals no full scale study of any of her African works which may undermine the justification for the thesis. This review, therefore, has tried to be as exhaustive as possible, although not all the literature could be taken into account.

A bibliographical survey on Laurence indicates that her African fiction has been ignored by literary critics, who have inordinately over-concentrated on her Canadian works. This overwhelming bias towards Laurence's Canadian works can be attributed to several probable factors. Foremost is the fact that if taken together, the four Manawaka novels form an imposing tetralogy and a fully realized fictional universe which tends to dwarf the impact of her African works. Posed against the deep and luxuriant world of the Manawaka fiction, the African works would appear to many critics as inadequate.

Moreover, most of Laurence's critics and reviewers have been Canadians, and to them the settings and concerns of her African works may have appeared discouragingly exotic. Therefore it is understandable that they have often found her Canadian works, which deal with a familiar experience, easily amenable to their critical response. It is significant to observe in this light that the only creditable exploration of Laurence's African works has been done by an African scholar, Micere Githae - Mugo in her critical treatise Visions of Africa.

¹ Margaret Laurence: An Appreciation (Ed.Christyl Verduyn) gives a comprehensive bibliography on Laurence, entitled "Books and Articles on Margaret Laurence."

Because of their exotic settings and concerns, Laurence's African works have never been seriously considered as belonging to the Canadian literary mainstream. Indeed, as Michelle Gadpaille has noted in The Canadian Short Story, only a few of the short stories collected in The Tomorrow Tamer have ever been included in the Canadian anthologies, although they have been acclaimed as some of her strongest and most memorable. They have been injudiciously dominated by the Canadian stories of A Bird in the House which have a more definite footing in mainstream Canadian literature. The critical imbalance between Laurence's African and Canadian works can therefore be understood within the context of these attitudes towards her works.

Margaret Laurence: An Appreciation (Verduyn, 1988) which is perhaps the latest comprehensive collection of critical essays on Margaret Laurence, presents a classic example of the uneven pattern of critical response to her African and Canadian works. Selected and published shortly after her death in 1987, the collection understandably displays an affective rather than purely scholarly attitude towards Laurence. The essayists say few things that are not laudatory of the writer and her works. Though the editor claims that the essays "are witness to changing critical approaches and attitudes to Laurence's work" (2), in such a vast collection where the majority of articles are devoted to her Canadian works, and only a paltry three to all her African, the one thing that appears not to have changed is the scholarly bias in favor of her Canadian works against the African.

Patricia Morley appears the most devoted to Laurence's African works in this collection. In "Margaret Laurence's Early Writing: a world in which others have to be respected" she duly acknowledges the importance of Laurence's African experience to her overall writing career, and points out that it is this experience both in Somaliland and Ghana which shaped her themes and sharpened her perspective. This fact that Laurence's African experience was germinal to her entire creative career has been widely acknowledged, but perhaps most articulately stated by George Woodcock:

In the case of Laurence, Africa provided the insights which unlocked her ability to perceive and to write about her own heritage, her own country, and there emerged that splendid series of time-obsessed myths of the Canadian prairies town from The Stone Angel (1964) down to The Diviners (1974)... (G.Woodcock, "Possessing the Land" in The Canadian Imagination, Ed David Staines, 93)

Morley argues that Laurence's African and Canadian works form "a seamless fabric" (11). She sees them as together representing an evolution of her vision of the human condition, so that an African - Canadian dichotomy in these works should not exist.

Morley's analysis of the theoretical affinity between O. Mannoni's The Psychology of Colonization and Laurence's African works helps to identify the factors that shaped Laurence's attitudes in her African fiction, among them her profound hatred of imperial oppression. Morley also points out correspondences between the two writers which include their adept dissection and exposure of the European imperialists' underlying

psyche, the psyche which conditioned their disposition towards Africa. Although Laurence may not have read The Psychology of Colonization when she wrote her African fiction, the kind of psychology that Mannoni exposes in this work as characterizing the imperialists in Madagascar can be very easily distilled from some of the white characters in The Tomorrow Tamer and This Side Jordan. The other similarity between Laurence and Mannoni which Morley notes is the recognition of "the difficulty yet the importance of understanding other individuals and other cultures" (13).

Morley reveals a very important formal aspect of This Side Jordan which she, however, does not give adequate weight to. She observes that the novel is built on a network of parallelisms between the two chief protagonists, Nathaniel Amegbe and Johnie Kestoe, and between their community backgrounds. This Side Jordan is a novel depicting individuals, a society, and a culture in transition, and it is therefore fruitful that Laurence gives us a set of parallel conditions within which to mark the fateful process of change. Moreover, this parallelism reveals the state of the Ghanaian society of the novel, bedeviled as it is by race polarities, and experiencing the tension of simultaneous attraction of the old and the new ways of life. It is this situation that Laurence undertakes to examine in This Side Jordan. and therefore the parallelism which Morley only notes in passing is actually the lifeline of the novel.

Morley's remarks on the stories in The Tomorrow Tamer are scanty. She only notes that they "deal with problems of human alienation and exile" (18). Although the theme of

alienation and exile is central to most of these stories, there is a lot more that Morley does not tackle, and which would be rewarding to explore.

On the whole, Morley portrays a fair grasp of the issues in Laurence's African works, except that she appears not to think her conception of Africa worthy of mention. It does not occur to her that Laurence is a stranger to Africa who is writing on a strange heritage, and therefore she does not answer the crucial question of what Africa is to Laurence. The main weakness of her commentary, though, is her ambitious attempt to lump together all of Laurence's diverse African works in a single review. Hence, although sporadically drawing some perceptive points on the works, her commentary tends to dwell on a broad generalization and lacks both pertinent illustrations and specific focus.

Her second article, "The Long Trek Home: The Stories of Margaret Laurence", is mainly a recap of the foregoing, but with a sharper focus on the short stories in The Tomorrow Tamer and A Bird in the House. Morley here re-emphasises the thematic unity between the African and the Canadian works of Laurence. Although she sees these works as dominated by images of the human condition, she neither sufficiently explains what these images are, nor adequately elaborates on what she means by the human condition. Because she singles out those stories of individuals who are struggling against alienation and social inhibitions, she sees Laurence's perception of the human condition as dominated by a search for fulfillment, acceptance and freedom. Her commentary leaves a lot of scope which would be rewarding to explore further.

In an entry on Margaret Laurence in The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature (Ed. William Toye) Joan Coldwell sees Laurence's African works as only introducing the themes of her major works. She sees them as mere precursors to the Canadian works, and fails to recognise that they have an artistic merit of their own. Although she claims that This Side Jordan and The Tomorrow Tamer are "more overtly political" and articulate Laurence's anti-imperialist sentiments, she does not document the writer's attitude towards Ghana's independence nor her views on the imperialists in Africa.

On the whole, Coldwell gives us only a cursory survey of Laurence's life and literary career, and does not explore the works under consideration to any depth. But she serves to illustrate the fact that scholars have upheld Laurence's Canadian works against her African. This is especially so because she finds it easy to claim, without substantiation, that "Laurence's greatest achievement to date lies in the four Canadian novels ..." (435).

In their introduction to Margaret Laurence in An Anthology of Canadian Literature in English, Vol. II, editors Donna Bennet and Russell Brown portray an undue impressionism towards Laurence's African fiction. For instance, they claim that This Side Jordan is "a novel that deals with Ghana's struggle for independence" and that it "remains an apprentice novel" (137). While it is arguable whether and how This Side Jordan is "an apprentice novel", it is outrightly incorrect to claim that it deals with Ghana's struggle for independence. The imminent independence of the country is no doubt important and

central in this novel, but nowhere do we see the struggle for the country's independence. Rather, the imminent independence and receding colonialism provide the novelist with a background or context within which to reveal some of her impressions of the country and the people. Even more importantly, as it is seen in the background moving towards independence, the country provides an apt analogy for the society and for the two main protagonists who, in a like manner, are struggling against alienating circumstances and moving towards self-realization. Therefore contrary to the impression created by Bennet and Russell, Ghana's independence in This Side Jordan is only part of, rather than the whole story.

In his review of Laurence's works, George Woodcock is more adroit at analyzing the transformation of the writer and the dynamics that have shaped her writing rather than the real issues of the works. Hence although he has written relatively widely on Laurence's works, his commentaries are better accomplished in biographical analysis than in critical illumination on the writer's creative output.

Nevertheless, he gives some valuable insights into Laurence's African works, and especially The Prophet's Camel Bell, which he holds in high regard. In "Many Solitudes: The Travel Writing of Margaret Laurence" (in his The World of Canadian Writing: Critiques and Recollections; Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1980) he regards this travelogue as being "at the centre of Margaret Laurence's achievement" (74). He sees

Laurence's experience in Somaliland, which The Prophet's Camel Bell documents, as the source of the themes of survival and exile which pervade all her fiction

Woodcock has also discussed Laurence's African works in a second essay entitled "The Human Elements: Margaret Laurence's Fiction" published in the same book. But his aim here is to justify his contention that Laurence is a national novelist in the manner of Russia's Leo Tolstoy. The crux of his essay comes in his consideration of A Bird in the House and the four Manawaka-set novels, which he sees as articulating the "characteristics and complexities" (55) of the Canadian national heritage. In his discussion of the African works, Woodcock concentrates more on the role of Laurence's personal experience in these works and therefore commits very little attention to the writer's portrayal of Africa. In this vein, he sees the characters in This Side Jordan only in the light of being a fictionalization of real people whom Laurence met in Africa.

Woodcock's comments on The Tomorrow Tamer are, however, more elucidative. He quite aptly sums it up as "largely a book about aliens and alienation" (49) and proceeds to explain, albeit too hastily, how various characters in various stories are social exiles seeking settlement. He lauds Laurence's achievement in these stories where he sees her as departing "from the cliché situation of racial confrontation" and avoiding "the excessively documentary portrayal of the white world abroad ..." (49)

In her introduction to the 1987 edition of The Tomorrow Tamer, Clara Thomas concentrates on Laurence's technique in the stories. She quite correctly observes that in writing each of these stories,

She has contracted herself into a literary form whose nature is paradoxical: characters must live in and through the imagination as surely as do the characters of a novel ... and yet compression, not spaciousness, must be the rule of their unfolding (xi).

In "The Human Element: Margaret Laurence's Fiction", Woodcock makes a similar observation:

... many of the pieces, like "The Rain Child" and "The Drummer of All the World" are really life stories, small novellas, in which a character mingles recollection with self-analysis in the attempt to discover the meaning of his life ... no Laurence character is a solipsistic island ..." (48)

As a result of this technique, most of the stories in The Tomorrow-Tamer are microcosmic contractions of life stories of several characters, rather than precise focuses on particular critical moments of a character as we would find in most short stories.

Thomas's introduction does not attempt to reveal the impression of Africa that emerges from the stories. But it is nonetheless commendable because it is one of the few commentaries on Laurence's works that really focus on the elements of the text without dwelling on the extraneous details of the writer's personal experience.

In his introduction to This Side Jordan G.D. Killam provides perhaps the most comprehensive of all critical approaches to this novel. He not only identifies the historical context within which this novel falls but also attempts to tackle thematic and stylistic issues arising from it.

Killam sees This Side Jordan as belonging to that "tradition of presenting Africa by expatriate writers" (x), and which he traces from as early as Daniel Defoe's Captain Singleton. He considers Laurence the best achiever in this tradition because of her authentic rendering of the African setting in both This Side Jordan and The Tomorrow Tamer. He sees this as due not only to Laurence's unique character as a person but also her nationality as a Canadian, which put her opposite the other expatriates in the colonial divide.

In terms of thematic concerns and depiction of the African scene in the novel, Killam places Laurence closer to African writers of her time like Chinua Achebe than to other expatriate writers. He sees This Side Jordan as looking at African life from the same insider's vantagepoint as Achebe's No Longer At Ease, and he gives credence to this assertion by a well sustained comparison between the two novels. His analysis of the main characters in the novel is remarkably thorough and perceptive within such little space. Through his analysis all the characters in This Side Jordan achieve a unity not only of interrelatedness but also of thematic enhancement.

Killam's comments on style in this novel are in defense of the interior monologue technique which has been widely disapproved of by critics and reviewers. Although admitting to a probable degree of contrivance in the way they are arranged, Killam contents that "the interior monologues of Amegbe are neither offensive nor unconvincing" (vii)

However, the critic does not fully acknowledge the resourcefulness of these interior monologues in the novel; for it is actually through these monologues, erratic as they are, that we are able to systematically reconstruct the historical truths of Nathaniel Amegbe and his people, and therefore rationalise their present state which is wreacked with confusion and frustration.

Moreover, as it shown in chapter three of this study, these interior monologues are stylistic bridges which Laurence uses to convey the story from one time and place to others, and to free it from the hemming in of conventions. Killam's defense responds only to those points that have been raised about the technique, and does not examine its other merits. But on the whole, his introduction, though handicapped by its brevity, and though not unraveling the writer's portraiture of Africa, remains commendable for its broad-based approach and pertinent commitment to issues of importance in this novel.

Micere Githae - Mugo is the only scholar who has done a meaningful study of Laurence's African works. In Visions of Africa (Nairobi, 1978) she has given us a well sustained

evaluation of Laurence alongside three other eminent novelists who have written on the African scene-- Chinua Achebe, Elspeth Huxley and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Although Mugo's treatise ultimately aims at portraying these novelists in a comparative light, it nonetheless gives valuable insights into the works of each.

Like Killam, Mugo acknowledges Laurence's success in penetrating and accurately depicting African society in her works, a success which she regards as singular because Laurence is an outsider to the African world she depicts. She also gives a deep analysis of Laurence's characters in This Side Jordan and The Tomorrow Tamer, summing them up as displaced individuals dominated by a search for "a place to feel at home ..." (60).

Mugo's real concern with Laurence's African works, however, is to show how the writer's perspective on Africa compares and contrasts with that of the three other novelists who have tackled the same subject. Visions of Africa does not analyze Laurence in her own individual light, but rather tries to show how she complements Achebe and Ngugi and contrasts with Huxley, if anything, in order to pass critical judgement on Huxley's particularly defracted angle of vision of African society. Her role in the treatise is quite simple: an outsider who has succeeded in presenting an insider's view to be posed against Huxley, a professed insider who gives an outsider's view. Consequent to this demand for comparison and contrast, the issues -- mainly relating to attitude to imperialism, cultural conflict and alienation -- on which Mugo examines Laurence, are apparently dictated to

her by the possibilities of Laurence's convergence or divergence with the three other novelists.

Therefore Mugo's study of Laurence in Visions of Africa is contextual and comparative. It dwells on Laurence as a background within which to illuminate Huxley's expatriate writing on Africa., and uses the African works as a yardstick with which to measure this writing in order to pass judgement over it. Her real emphasis therefore is on Huxley's portraiture of Africa rather than Laurence's

On the other hand, this thesis reveals Laurence's African fiction in its own individual light. It attempts to answer one question which the nature and scope of Mugo's treatise could not allow her to answer. This is the question "What is Africa in Laurence's perception".

A major point of departure with Mugo's treatise is that, whereas Mugo concentrates on 'vision', the angle of perception, or the way of seeing, this study concentrates on 'image', or what Laurence perceives of Africa. Mugo's study would serve to answer the question whether Laurence explores African society from an outsider's or an insider's standpoint, and whether she does this competently. On the other hand, this study tries to answer a different question: what does Laurence portray Africa to be?

In conclusion, as this literature review indicates, critical scholarship on Laurence's fiction has removed emphasis from her African works and placed it on the Canadian. Moreover,

those scholars who have attempted to study Laurence's African works have concentrated on explaining how they complement her Canadian fiction or the other writing on Africa, and neglected the issues that these works raise in themselves. In addition, the image of Africa that these works portray has never been studied. As this review points out, the crucial task at hand is to examine Laurence's African works in order to evaluate her portraiture of African society.

The thesis of this study is that Margaret Laurence creates a positive and optimistic image of Africa in her African works. The study also tests the hypothesis that in her African works, Laurence strongly condemns imperialism and portrays colonialism as an undue inhibition to human freedom.

This study approaches Laurence's African fiction from the New Criticism theoretical framework. Before proceeding to show how this framework would work for the texts under study, it would suffice to explain what New Criticism entails. As Ross C. Murfin aptly puts it, New Criticism "concentrates on the relationships within the text that give it its own distinctive character and form." (Murfin, 261) Special attention is paid to a close analysis of the text, rather than basing interpretations "on the reader's response, the author's stated intentions, or parallels between the text and historical contexts..." (260-1). The overall emphasis is therefore placed on the texts and what ideas they reveal from within their pages, rather than on historical, biographical, or other interpretive circumstances.

We are obliged to mention here that we are aware of other theoretical frameworks that would be relevant in analysing these works. For example, Postcolonial theory as expounded by Sarah Nutall in her seminar paper “Theories of Culture and Subjectivity: An Overview” is particularly relevant since it provides a framework for postcolonial discourse analysis and for interpreting colonial representations ‘the Other.’ However, we choose the New Criticism approach since it offers a more versatile frame of interpretation which enables us to address both the form and the content of the works under review.

In choosing the New Criticism theoretical approach, we recognize that literature is an art form in which content and form are interdependent. As such, the relevance of a work of art to the life it portrays is equally important as the technical qualities of its composition. Therefore it is not possible to evaluate the views and experiences that a work of art delineates, yet fail to examine the structural features of the composition or the technical performance of the writer. Laurence's artistic method and its effectiveness are therefore a valid and indispensable concern of this study. Hence, in addition to agreeing or disagreeing with Laurence's portrayal of life in Africa, the study also examines the constructional elements of each of the works, and assesses how effective these elements are in expressing the author's ideas and world-view.

In addition to the analytical exposition of each text, critical opinion has been sought from other books, journals and magazines in order to enlighten the study. Moreover,

biographical information on Laurence, particularly relating to her stay in Africa, has been sought -- not to provide an interpretive framework for the study-- but in order to enrich our understanding of the processes and experiences in the writer's life that may have influenced her perceptions of Africa.

Besides this introduction, the study consists of four chapters and a conclusion. Chapter One gives a literary biography of Margaret Laurence and explores the broad creative universe of her artistic works. Chapter Two examines the portraiture of Somaliland in Laurence's autobiographical work, The Prophet's Camel Bell. Chapter Three analyses the image of the pre-independence African generation and the nation of Ghana in This Side Jordan, while Chapter Four looks at the images of change depicted in The Tomorrow Tamer and Other Stories. A summary and evaluation of the portraiture of Africa in all the three works is given in the Conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE

MARGARET LAURENCE: A LITERARY BIOGRAPHY

“H.M. Colonial Service Somaliland protectorate. A vacancy has occurred for a civil engineer to take charge, under the direction of the Director of Public Works, of the construction of approximately 30 earth dams over an area of 6,500 miles ... (PCB,10-11).”

This advertisement in a London newspaper in 1950 started Margaret Laurence's venture into Africa, a venture which turned out to be the culminating point of her life and the cradle of her flourishing writing career. Her husband, Jack Laurence, secured the engineering job, and thus enabled Margaret Laurence to travel and live in Somaliland between 1950 and 1952. In Africa, exposed to an unfamiliar people and culture, she began to probe into her consciousness in search of a better understanding not only of the Somali people but also of herself. In Africa, she was also confronted with the stark reality of colonialism, and from this experience she acquired a universally valid outlook to the human condition. In Africa too she began her writing career in earnest, an undertaking from which she was to emerge two decades later as one of the foremost Canadian and world novelists.

The story of Laurence's journey in Somaliland is told in The Prophet's Camel Bell, a part travelogue and part autobiography which is one of her three immensely rich African works. The other two are This Side Jordan, her first novel ever, and The Tomorrow Tamer, which is a collection of her finest short stories. Taken together these works consist

of a richly varied artistic creation which effectively launched Laurence into her remarkable writing career

The writer was born Jean Margaret Wemyss in 1926 in Neepawa, in the Canadian Prairie province of Manitoba. Her parents -- Robert Wemyss and Verna Simpson -- were immigrants of Scot and Irish descent. Both died when Laurence was still very young -- her mother when she was four and her father when she was nine. With the death of her parents, Laurence was left under the care of her aunt Margaret Simpson in the house of her grandfather, John Simpson.

In 1943 when she was awarded a scholarship to study at United College, Winnipeg, she got the first opportunity to move out of her grandfather's house and away from the small town community of Neepawa. This environment had been a social prison to her, and her moving to Winnipeg was therefore like a break for long sought freedom.

At the age of twenty-two, she married Jack Laurence, a civil engineer, with whom she travelled to England in 1949. In 1950 when her husband was assigned an engineering project by the colonial government, Laurence travelled with him to the then colonial Somaliland Protectorate after passing off as "an accomplished woodswoman" (PCB, 11) since no appropriate accommodation for married couples could be arranged in this country immediately. After a two years stay in Somaliland the Laurences moved out to the then Gold Coast, West Africa, where they remained until 1957

Back in Canada, Laurence separated with her husband and went to live with her children in England where she began work on her Canadian novels. Returning again to Canada after ten years in England, she was engaged as a writer-in-residence at the University of Toronto. She left in 1970 to stay at a summer cottage she had bought on the Otonabee River. She later made her permanent home in Lakefield, Ontario, where she died in 1987, leaving fourteen books of a vast variety to her credit.

Laurence's childhood in her grandfather's house and her seven year's sojourn in Africa were perhaps the two most important episodes in her entire life. Both made a lasting impact on her career as a writer and her way of looking at the world. She had an uneasy early childhood. The death of both her parents before she was even ten left her trapped, rather like Vanessa Macleod in her A Bird in the House short stories, in the house of her stern Grandfather Simpson. Raised in this restrictive and frustrating environment, Laurence grew up to cherish the value of human freedom. Her own experiences of oppression in her grandfather's house produced in her a deep hatred for oppression of any kind.

Images of Laurence's childhood are to be found throughout her fiction, in which she presents us with characters trapped under various situations and therefore struggling for release. The fictional town of 'Manawaka' -- home to all the five protagonists of her Canadian fiction -- is seen as inspired by the small prairie town of Neepawa where she

lived as a child. The autocratic Grandfather Timothy Connor in A Bird in the House can also be seen as a semi-biographical recreation of her own Grandfather John Simpson under whose stern restriction she grew up

Laurence's childhood also marked the beginning of her interest in writing. She wrote her first story, "Pillars of the Nation", for a Winnipeg Free Press Contest when she was fifteen, and won a honourable mention for it. It is in this story that the name Manawaka, thereafter so dominant in her fiction, begins

As a child Laurence was also an avid reader, and the fact that her step-mother was a librarian gave her enormous reading opportunities. At a fairly tender age she read Rudyard Kipling's books about far off places like India. As she confessed, this "instilled in me a vast desire to travel to far places" and "helped to open my imagination to far off places and long ago people (Verduyn, 239-40). Reading Laurence's stories about Somaliland in The Prophet's Camel Bell and about Morag Gunn's ancestral lands in Scotland, in The Diviners, this influence becomes more apparent. Her feelings for the colonised Somali and for the highland clans of Scotland in these two works is not unlike what she described as Kipling's "enormous sympathy and even empathy with the people of India (Verduyn, 239).

Laurence's African sojourn between 1950 and 1957 was enormously fruitful. It yielded five important and varied literary works namely: A Tree for Poverty, Somali Poetry and

Prose (1954), This Side Jordan (1960) The Tomorrow Tamer (1963), and Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists 1952 - 1966 (1968).

Her stay in the harsh country of Somaliland, her contact with the unfamiliar culture of the Somali, and her observation of the gratuitous contempt of the English community towards the local people shaped her subsequent outlook towards the human condition and sharpened her artistic perspective.

The import of this experience in Africa to Laurence's life and career has been acknowledged by many critics, among them Patricia Morley in her essay "Margaret Laurence's early writing: a world in which others have to be respected":

In Africa, exposed to the puzzlingly different people and cultures, Laurence began to understand herself and her own culture. In Africa, she was a stranger, subject to the alienation which she depicts as central to human experience (Verduyn, 80).

Laurence translated her experience in Africa into enduring themes for her fiction. It was her observation of fellow human beings in this unfamiliar environment which sharpened her grasp of the themes of search for freedom and human dignity, and the importance of and inhibitions to human communication.

In Somaliland in 1950, Laurence began collecting and translating Somali poems and folktales into English. It was a daunting task, for not only did she know very little Somali then but also the people she approached were reluctant to share their folktales with a

stranger. However, by the time she left the country in 1952, she had handed in a translated collection of this folk literature to be published by the colonial government. This appeared several years later as A Tree for Poverty, the first collection ever of Somali poems and stories in English translation.

For Laurence, collecting and translating these poems and stories was “a labour of love” (PCB, 248), her love for the Somali people, their land and culture, which is so apparent in The Prophet’s Camel Bell. Contact with Somali literature through this work revealed to Laurence the seams of the Somali soul and culture, something which the dismissive contempt of the other expatriates in Somaliland then could never achieve. To many of these expatriates, the Somali were an insensitive people, “incapable of any emotions as subtle as tenderness or love” (PCB, 101). They saw them just as a faceless, benighted tribe to be governed. But the rich and meticulous literature which Laurence’s translation exposed implied the complete opposite -- it revealed a people with passionate feelings towards love, women and war, and to a degree that even the Europeans were themselves incapable of. A Tree for Poverty was therefore not just a pioneering work in Somali literature in translation; it was also a crucial step towards intercultural understanding and an antidote against the cultural jingoism of the English community in Somaliland.

Nine years after she had left Somaliland and many miles away in England, Laurence recreated from her memoirs The Prophet’s Camel Bell. This is part autobiography and part travelogue which records her journey from Europe to Somaliland, and her two years stay

among the Somali people in the dusty plains where her husband was detailed to construct water reservoirs. This work is a portrait both of Somali people and their country during this period of transition through contact with the West, and of Laurence herself growing in self-perception through contact with an unfamiliar culture. More than even her observation of the Somali facing imperialism in the early 1950's and agonising with them over their hardships under the life-sapping environment of their country, The Prophet's Camel Bell is a glimpse of Laurence herself in these distant lands. As she observes in this book, "the strangest glimpse you may have of any creature in the distant lands will be those you catch of yourself" (PCB, 10).

From the sun-baked plains of the Horn of Africa, Laurence's next station was in the then imperial Gold Coast, West Africa, the country in which she was to set her first novel, This Side Jordan, and a collection of short stories, The Tomorrow Tamer. Laurence moved to this country at a time when it was in the process of a tumultuous transition from colonisation to independence. This gave her a rich opportunity to observe the experience of the people caught in the spectacle of change, an experience which she has aptly depicted in her West African stories.

In This Side Jordan, she presents us with a nation and with individuals grappling with the intricacies of change. Ghana is moving away from colonialism to self-rule. The nation must therefore come to terms with this new reality and at the same time look forward to the unfolding future. Nathaniel Amegbe, an African school-teacher, has to overcome a

simultaneous attraction to the receding ways of his fore-fathers and the new ways brought about by contact with the white man. For Johnie Kestoe, an English expatriate working in Ghana, the end of Empire means that he has to descend from the high perch of privilege which colonialism had maintained for him, and to accept himself for his actual worth. This unfolding scenario gives Laurence a rich opportunity to explore the themes of the struggle for personal liberty against the hold of family and tradition, and the challenges of nationhood. It also gives her an opportunity to lash out at colonialism and its attendant vices of exploitation and racism, and also to express her sympathy for the predicament of Africans and her optimism for their future.

The Tomorrow - Tamer is a collection of nine of Laurence's best short stories. The stories are all set in Ghana and they reflect on the predicament of various individuals and communities as they grapple with changes in their milieu. Of special concern to Laurence in these stories is the process of Africans adjusting to changes in their universe. They, as individuals and as communities, must rise above the hold of tradition and master the emergent social phenomena if they are to survive; and Laurence is optimistic that they are capable of this.

Laurence's other work on Africa is Long Drums and Cannons, a critical appreciation of eleven Nigerian dramatists and novelists. It is a tribute to the creative efforts of these writers, a celebration of their concern and understanding of the problems of their people. She appreciates their forms as individual writers, but especially their innovative use of the

English language which she sees as “capable of expressing both West African mode of expression and a West african idiom.” (199). She recognises that these writers have had to extend the horizons of the English language in order to accommodate the complex African reality.

Laurence is also interested in these artists’ treatment of their past. She acknowledges that they “are engaged in assessing their past, in rediscovering their inheritance, in interpreting themselves both to their people and to the rest of the world” (9). In so doing, they play the important role of correcting the image of their people which has been misrepresented by outsiders for a long time.

Laurence’s cycle of five inter-related works of fiction set in Canada -- The Stone Angel, A Jest of God, The Fire-Dwellers, A Bird in the House and The Diviners -- are all woven around a fictional prairie town called Manawaka. This is the birth-place of all the five protagonists in these novels, and the works have therefore also been known as the “Manawaka cycle”. The cycle is unified not only by this fictional town but also through character inter-relatedness and the fact that they all present us with troubled women protagonists of five successive generations: from the girl child Vanessa Macleod of A Bird in the House to the ninety years old Hagar Shipley of The Stone Angel.

The Stone Angel is the first in this Manawaka cycle and the novel represents today Laurence’s departure from the African scene and her entry into her native Canadian world.

Although it was the first to be published of the Manawaka works, this novel can be seen as representing the last in the five generations of Laurence's female protagonists.

The Stone Angel is a moving story of Hagar Shipley who, although incapacitated and slowly disintegrating towards death, takes us through the full course of her life in a series of recollections. Throughout her life, Hagar has been unable to fully experience freedom and joy. She has always come up against inhibitions placed in her way by her families -- as daughter, mother and wife -- by community expectations, and also by her own pride. Her life has been a perpetual, spirited struggle against these hurdles in her attempt to achieve joy and independence.

In the end, as she helplessly waits for her death in a hospital bed, she cannot recall anything "truly free" she has done in all the ninety years of her life except two: one "joke" and a "lie" (307). Her life's struggle has been that vain; but then, as she observes elsewhere, perhaps all she wanted in life was "simply to rejoice"(292). Life, then, is an endless struggle for freedom and joy, and however unsuccessful ours may be, as Laurence indicates through the story of Hagar, we must never forget that life itself is a gift and we must never hesitate to rejoice for it.

In terms of characterization, narrative techniques and language, The Stone Angel undoubtedly represents Laurence's creative zenith. The novel has a complex yet coherent narrative form, very rich in imagery and symbolism. But perhaps its most outstanding

property is its brilliant manipulation of the time dimension. Because the narrative persona is slowly drifting towards death, the real time of the novel is very short, and a captivating sense of urgency hangs over the novel -- the protagonist may die before she has told her story. But through an interplay between focus on the present and flashbacks, the novel is made to last a whole lifetime.

Through this manipulation of the dimension of time, Laurence yields in this one novel two levels of plot -- one belonging to the time present and the other to the time remembered. While the plot of the narrative present moves the action of the novel forward, that of the time remembered serves to put Hagar's past into perspective and reveal her character. Reading this novel is rather like driving forward and at the same time looking back through the rear-view mirror.

A Jest of God, the second Manawaka novel is less ambitious than The Stone Angel in both its content and form. This novel is the story of Rachel Cameron, a thirty-four years old school teacher who lives with her stern, nagging mother. At this age, Rachel is still unmarried and a virgin. Laurence uses interior monologue to reveal to us Rachel's innermost fears and desires. She leads a life fringed with anxiety and painful inhibitions placed by her community's expectations of what a good girl should be like. But she suffers as much from the suffocating environment of the Presbyterian Manawaka community as from her own excessive self-consciousness. She is always agonising over her appearance and over whether she is living upto community expectations.

Rachel then confronts her social restraints during one summer holiday when she has an affair with Nick Kazlik, her school days' friend. This affair is followed by a moment of intense anxiety for Rachel, who hopes and at the same time fears that she is pregnant. When her doctor finally confirms that Rachel only has a benign tumor, it is a terrible "Jest of God" for her, considering the emotional strain this had caused her.

But then, the whole sexual episode -- from sex to false pregnancy -- leaves Rachel the stronger. She can now overcome her self-conscious embarrassment, conquer her stern mother and look the Manawaka community in the face. She can now leave her self-made prison of Manawaka, and at last we see her breaking for freedom as she moves from Manawaka towards the coast.

Apart from the innovative use of interior monologues throughout the novel, A Jest of God has none of the sophistication of Laurence's other novels. It has a simple linear plot which gives the story a neat texture and a logical sense of movement, as if to keep with Rachel's growing confidence.

The chief protagonist in the third and the least celebrated of Laurence's novels, The Fire-Dwellers, is an elder married sister of Rachel Cameron's. Stacey McAindra is the most troubled of Laurence's protagonists. She leads an extremely boring life as a housewife, a mother and a wife who has very few outlets, and an uncommunicative husband. This

occurs to her against a background of her younger, more exciting life as a young lady in Manawaka. With this fresh in her memory and with her young daughter, Katie, always around to constantly remind her, she finds it hard and painful to accept that she is aging.

Like all Laurence's protagonists, Stacey is dissatisfied and trapped, and not in Manawaka this time, but in the cocoon of her household and by her roles as a mother and wife. Like all of them, she has to find a way out of this prison. Her release finally comes through an extra-marital affair with Luke. Although this man is much younger than herself and a total stranger, he nevertheless gives Stacey a much needed and long-sought alternative to her husband. At last, Stacey can make a choice between her husband and another man, and this possibility gives her release, reconciliation and self-possession. It gives her a richer life than the suffocating environment of her household.

Laurence's fourth Canadian work is a set of finely written short stories collected under the little A Bird in the House. All the stories in this collection are told to us by Vanessa Macleod, a girl who grew up in Manawaka in the 1930's, during the years of the Great Depression. Like in The Stone Angel, the narrative persona in these stories is an older person reflecting on her younger years as a child.

A Bird in the House is as much a story of Vanessa's growing up years as a sketch of the Connor and Macleod families during the Great Depression. In their entirety, these stories

tell of the families' inter-relationships, their pioneering founders and their proud struggles, their losses and joys.

These stories can be seen as semi-autobiographical. The life of the young Vanessa presents such a close parallel with Laurence's as a child that Vanessa can be seen as a recreation of the author's childhood experiences. Like Laurence, Vanessa is a young authoress who on several occasions tries to capture the life around her in words, however elusive this turns out to be. Vanessa's view of her grandfather Connor whom she characterises as "the old bear" is also very similar to Laurence's view of her Grandfather Simpson in whose house she lived as a child.

All the eight stories in A Bird in the House are inter-related, and it is tempting to see the collection as a novel. The stories share the same setting -- both of the time and place. They also share the narrative voice, that of Vanessa Macleod reaching out from the vantage-point of adulthood to recount the experiences of her family when she was a child. A further source of continuity in these stories is their shared characters who are drawn from the Macleod and Connor families, and most of whom appear in each of the stories.

In spite of the setting, narrative and character interconnections, each of the stories in A Bird in the House is a fully realised unit independent of each other. None builds upon and none anticipates any other, as chapters in a novel normally would. Therefore rather than

being one organic whole, this collection is more of a mosaic of independent but inter related narrative entities.

The Diviners is Laurence's last novel, her longest and most complex. It is the story of Morag Gunn, a forty-seven years old writer, divorced and living alone in her house in the banks of a river which "flows both ways". Morag is full of anxiety and apprehensiveness towards a life in which it has been difficult to settle, to be respectable and to be acceptable. Most of her anxiety though is towards her eighteen years old daughter, Pique, whom she conceived after an affair with a little respected Metis (half-breed) friend of hers in a desperate act of rebellion.

The novel is built on a multiple time scale which produces a double narrative sequence, rather like in The Stone Angel. The narrative present focuses on Morag in her present residence at McConnel's Landing. But this narrative present is intermittedly broken into by numerous flashbacks into her past . It is these flashbacks which give us the bulk of her story right from her birthplace, Manawaka, the same town of the earlier novels which is fringed with social and racial prejudices. The flashbacks build Morag's profile through her shameful youth in the house of her adopted father, Christie Logan, scavenger of Manawaka and friend of Morag's departed parents. They take us through her nascent writing career; her divorce after a painfully pretentious marriage and her begetting of Pique with Jules Tonerre, a Metis friend from her Manawaka childhood; her traveling in England and her visit to her parents' ancestral land in Scotland; and finally her settling at

her current home at MacConnel's Landing. When the past merges with the present -- when the past Morag has always run away from finally catches up with her -- the novel ends.

The Diviners uses a complex narrative technique borrowed from cinematography. The past is brought to us through a series of "Memory bank Movies" in which Morag's consciousness focuses on specific episodes or incidents in her past which are considered significant. There are also "snap-shots" and "inner films" which give even sharper focus to particular aspects of her experience. All these help us to complete Morag's profile and to rationalise her present situation.

The Diviners is a rich and powerful novel, and as Laurence's last, a befitting conclusion to her immensely resourceful writing career. Throughout her works, Laurence has indicated through her protagonists the inescapable role of our past in producing our present predicaments, and her last novel serves to underscore this point. Morag, Jules and Pique are all struggling for acceptance -- at least self-acceptance -- against a background of personal histories which lack any respectable heritage to pride in. They therefore have to ruminate on the dry bones of tales of their ancestors' deeds of valour. But even in this, they find that these tales are more or less mythical when cast against the immediate needs of their present predicaments.

Laurence also indicates that we can never escape from our past as it will always come up in our attempts to come to terms with our present. Morag's present consciousness is dominated by the memory of her past, even her ancestral past, however hard she tries to break away from it.

With The Diviners, the evolution of Laurence's fictional universe which started with Africa is completed. In relation to her Canadian writing in particular, this novel can be seen as a powerful final sweep of a painter's brush which completes the broad canvas of Manawaka. In it is a reference to almost all major and minor characters of her Canadian works. Her themes can also be seen as finally accomplished in this work because Morag, alone among all five of Laurence's heroines, is truly free and on her own terms. Pique too has finally accepted herself and fully embraced her heritage for what it is.

Manawaka sticks out as the most dominant feature in Laurence's creative landscape. Although it appears in all the five Canadian works as a town, it is not just a fictional setting for her stories but something more significant in relation to her characters. Manawaka is also a symbol which implies something of the human condition.

To Laurence's heroines, Manawaka is not only their birthplace but also an essential condition of their being, a condition that defines the quality of their lives. It is a rigid perimeter of their social expectations. The small town has influenced Hagar, Rachel,

Stacey, Vanessa and Morag on every level of their personalities. Each one of them carries within her conscience some powerful stamp of this town.

Manawaka also in a sense defines the human condition in Laurence's creative vision. In each of her heroines who are struggling to release themselves from the stultifying influence of this small town, we can see something of ourselves. In these heroines' struggle against the pall of Manawaka over their lives, we can grasp something typical of the human struggle to step out of the shadows of our ancestral heritage. It is because of this recognition of a part of ourselves in Hagar, Rachel, Stacey, Vanessa and Morag that these characters engage our sympathies. Their predicament is not altogether alien to us.

Taken as a continuous whole, Laurence's African and Canadian work forms a complex but coherent vision of the universal human condition. Patricia Morley has correctly observed that the African and Canadian works form "a seamless fabric, a steady growth and maturation of a way of seeing ..." (Verduyn, 10). Whereas this is true, it will also be observed that while her African writing is diverse (a novel, a collection of short stories, a critical work, an autobiography, and a translation of poems and prose) the Canadian is centered -- both by its setting in Manawaka and by its focus on the consciousness of women protagonists.

Many critics have ignored Laurence's African books, perhaps finding it easier to discuss the more systematic Manawaka cycle than the mixed African corpus. But the importance

of Africa to Laurence's creative career and to the evolution of her artistic vision can not be underestimated. Her contact with Africa's alien landscape greatly helped to direct the course of her creative development. The discovery of Africa to her had a germinal effect in that it contributed to the development of her literary mind. From this land, she learned not only the subtleties of characterization and the attraction of exotic settings but most important of all, she learned to probe the nature of freedom, which is an enduring concern in her Manawaka cycle of fiction.

Hence Africa can be seen as part of the Manawaka world of Margaret Laurence, or even its cradle. It stands in her imagination as the reference point of her creative universe, the rich soil from which her luxuriant writing career grew.

At this point, we can turn to look into Laurence's creative works on Africa in order to examine her perception of fellow human beings in this unfamiliar environment.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PROPHET'S CAMEL-BELL: A PORTRAIT OF THE SOMALI AND THEIR CULTURE

In the Prophet's Camel Bell Margaret Laurence tells the story of her journey from Europe to Somaliland and of her experiences in and perception of this country while she lived there between 1950 and 1952. The Prophet's Camel Bell is therefore both an autobiography and a travel - book in which Laurence captures the portrait of the Somali people, their culture and milieu as she encountered them. In addition the work raises issues related to the imperatives of travel and self-portraiture which call for examination.

An autobiography is a work in which a writer tells about himself. The ordinary autobiography records one's process of growing up from childhood to adulthood, such as in Ezekiel Mphahlele's Down Second Avenue, Malcom X's The Autobiography of Malcom X, or Maxim Gorky's autobiographical trilogy, My Childhood, My Apprenticeship and My Universities. In all these works the writers tell stories about themselves which capture their life histories from childhood.

However, other writers have told stories about specific episodes in their lives which were significant to them, and these too can be regarded as autobiographies. In this category is Karen Blixen's Out of Africa in which she tells the story of her life in her coffee farm in Kenya between 1913 and 1931. In The Flame Trees of Thika Elspeth Huxley has

recollected her childhood in Kenya in the early settlement years, and this too is an autobiographical work. Likewise, in The Prophet's Camel Bell, Laurence has told us about her intense two year's experience among the Somali in the Horn of Africa.

In addition to telling us about individual personalities, autobiographies also tell us about great or significant times. More specifically, they tell us about the place of individual personalities within significant times. Down Second Avenue, for instance, is not so much a story about Ezekiel Mphahlele as one about his response to and involvement in the struggle against apartheid and racial oppression in South Africa. Likewise, The Autobiography of Malcom X is about the role of Malcom X in the emergence of the Nation of Islam in the United States of America, just as The Mau Mau General is the story of General China's contribution in the Mau Mau liberation struggle in Kenya. It would certainly be impossible to think of all these fine autobiographies without the great events of history that they represent. Therefore just as great times produce great personalities, the documentation of one's role in these great times produces autobiographies.

Sometimes autobiographies are the observations of great periods from a personal dimension. In a sense, they involve borrowing from personal experience to illustrate on historical events. In so doing the autobiographer produces a personal statement on these events. An example of this is Oginga Odinga's autobiography, Not Yet Uhuru, in which he tells about his life especially as it relates to the struggle for Kenya's independence. The autobiography, in a sense, is also Odinga's testimony on the unfolding of Kenya's

independence and the turbulent politics of the nation's formative years in which he was caught as the first Vice President.

Autobiographies are important for, among other reasons, their richness in historical information. They are usually valuable historical documents which not only give us accounts of the events of their time but also capture the essential spirit of their age. We can easily learn of the prevailing ideologies of an age by examining its autobiographical output. This is possible because autobiographers not only narrate stories of their life and times but also inject these stories with a sense of moral value, either their own or that of their age and group.

For instance Blixen's Out of Africa and Huxley's The Flame Trees of Thika easily yield from their pages the racist settler values of the early twentieth century colonial Kenya. Likewise, from The Narrative of the life of Fredrick Douglass, we can discern the anti-slavery ideology of his black American community.

Since most autobiographical works narrate the life stories of people who have excelled in their vocations or who have played significant roles in shaping the history of their time, autobiographies have come to be perceived only as stories of great personalities. Most well known autobiographers are famous figures who have participated in epoch - making events, hence the autobiography is assumed to be a story about some important public life. However, The Prophet's Camel Bell is the story of a vocationless woman in an out of the

way country. Therefore the work posits the question: on what premise did Laurence undertake to write an autobiography on her experience in Somaliland? How important was her life in this country such that it deserved public expression.

From her accounts in The Prophet's Camel Bell we learn that Laurence led a quiet private life, mostly keeping house with her Somali servants, and trying to learn as much as she could about the country from her limited circle of Somali and European acquaintances. Therefore in her autobiography Laurence does not tell a story about her public life in Somaliland since she was not a public personality. Rather, she tells an equally interesting personal story -- a story about the life of the mind. Her story is an account of her psychic response to her contact with the Somali and their culture, of her personal impressions of the country and the various people she encountered while traveling there.

In the book we find Laurence grappling self-consciously with her own identity and the cultural and human vitality of the Somali as she encounters the unfamiliar people. She is therefore more or less a spiritual autobiographer who is pre-occupied with the inner psychological experience and perceptions rather than external activity.

Yet, still, this story reveals and distinguishes Laurence as a person. In its expression of her unique responses to the Somali and its iconoclastic critique of the imperial attitudes of the time, The Prophet's Camel Bell establishes Laurence's virtue and affirms her unique

personality. It also gives us a glimpse of her own self-conception, and therefore, like all autobiographies, this work is an attempt at self-expression and a portrayal of self-hood.

Writing an autobiography holds out certain attractions as well as difficulties. Its main attraction is that it involves writing about oneself and therefore about facts that, having been directly experienced by the author, are readily known to himself. At the same time, self-portraiture is not a simple feat, principally because it involves self-disclosure. All of us have an innate need for secrecy, especially in matters that relate directly to ourselves. Our personal lives are full of secrets which are closely linked to our self-esteem.

Disclosure of such personal secrets is inhibited by our capacity for embarrassment, which is present in the psychological make-up of all normal human beings. Therefore, like witnesses in a court of law, autobiographers promise to tell nothing but the truth, but their truth ends up being mitigated upon by the demand of their ego to avoid self-embarrassment. It is simply difficult to expose information that is self-deprecating or to admit to our own inadequacies.

In telling us about themselves autobiographers try to elicit a favorable response from us and to win our sympathy for their world - view. In their attempt to manipulate our responses to their favour they end up giving us subjective truth rather than the purely objective. Houston A. Baker Jr. sums up this relationship between truthfulness and autobiographical rendering in his essay "Autobiographical Acts and the Voice of the Southern Slave" in which he quotes a scholar of black American autobiography thus:

Admittedly, the autobiography has limitations as a vehicle of truth. Although so long an accepted technique towards understanding, the self-portrait often tends to be formal and posed, idealized or purposely exaggerated. The author is bound by his organized self. Even if he wishes, he is unable to remember the whole story or to interpret the complete experience (Bloom, 95).

The question of truthfulness is therefore inherent in any consideration of self-representation. It is also a major concern when it comes to subjecting autobiography to systematic literary analysis. However, our critique of The Prophet's Camel Bell can only recognize the problem of truthfulness and then skirt it, since the autobiography deals with a period and experience we cannot go back to for verification of facts.

Truthfulness in autobiography depends on the relationship between the autobiographer and his subject, and this relationship in turn depends on whether the subject is personal or historical. If the subject of the autobiography is personal it demands disclosure of information which is closely linked to the autobiographer's self-image, and therefore it becomes difficult to be strictly truthful. A historical subject, on the other hand, may involve writing more about others and events than about oneself, and we can therefore expect more honesty and greater detail from the autobiographer on this.

Two examples here would suffice to illustrate the personal and historical subject. My Pride and Joy, the autobiography of world renowned conservationist the late George Adamson, has many instances of personal subject in the parts where Adamson touches on his strained relationship with his eccentric wife, Joy. In these parts we can expect less

truthfulness than in those in which Adamson talks about his conservation work and his pride of lions, which comprise a historical subject. Likewise, in Not Yet Uhuru, when Oginga Odinga presents the ideological debate over Kenya's relations with socialist states which rocked his relationship with the government of the day, we can see him as rendering a historical subject. Here we can expect more truthfulness than when he renders memories of his childhood earlier in the autobiography.

Laurence's autobiography discourses more on her perception of the cross-cultural responses between the Somali and the expatriate English community in Somaliland than on her life as an individual. It therefore constitutes a historical subject on which we can expect more honesty from the writer than is ordinarily possible in the personal autobiography.

In A Poetics of Women's Autobiography (Bloomington, 1987) Sidonie Smith also illuminates on the subject of truthfulness in autobiography. Although her principal concern is with the gender imperatives of women's self-representation, her observations are no less true for other autobiographies. She contends that a woman's autobiography inevitably bears "four marks of fictiveness" namely the "fictions of memory, of the 'I', of the imagined reader, of the story" (45).

Smith sees an autobiographical project as an attempt at recovery and recreation of past experience which is continually informed by shifting considerations of the present moment.

She argues that “the autobiographer has to rely on a trace of something from the past, a memory”. But memory, she adds, “is ultimately a story about, and thus a discourse on, original experience” (45). Therefore, recovering the past is an interpretation of earlier experience and cannot be entirely free from the influence of subsequent experience.

By this argument therefore, autobiographical rendering involves re-arranging and interpreting past experience -- rather than actually recapturing it -- and in so doing, simultaneously filtering it through values and consciousness acquired in subsequent encounters. It is a discourse or a story on the autobiographer’s past experience as viewed from the vantagepoint of his present consciousness. Rather than an actual representation, the autobiography is an approximation of the writer’s past and self.

In The Prophet’s Camel Bell, Laurence attempts to reconstruct an experience which she had undergone ten years earlier. This is done in England, many miles away from the actual scene of the experience in Somaliland. Therefore, true to the foregoing argument, this experience filters to her through a vast physical and temporal distance. Within this distance her values and consciousness have undergone at least some basic shift. We can therefore argue that the story in this work is discourse on, an interpretation of, Laurence’s experience in Somaliland rather than an actual recapturing of this experience.

Smith sees the autobiographical self as a “fictive persona” (46) or “a cultural and linguistic fiction constituted through historical ideologies of selfhood and the process of story-

telling”, rather than “a true presence” (45). Simplified, her argument is that in the process of story telling the autobiographer is constantly trying to capture the essence and shape of himself on paper. Although he aims at producing a self-portrait, his self-conception is affected by the pressures of the narrative and of historical circumstances. What the autobiographer ultimately produces, therefore, is a textual rendition of himself as patterned by these pressures rather than the empirical person. The empirical person is replaced by a textual persona in the process of story-telling.

In addition, the autobiographer has to project onto some readership, as all storytellers must respond to their perceived audience. He has to be sensitive to his imagined readers and his story must respond to their expectations. Thus, he is forced to edit or treat some of the elements of his experience, and even to expand and embellish others, in order to meet the expectations of his imagined readers.

In a seminar paper entitled “Towards an Inter-cultural Understanding: Margaret Laurence’s The Prophet’s Camel Bell” (Kiiru, 1992) Muchugu Kiiru contends that Laurence’s “implied audience is foreign to the Somali”. He sees evidence of this in the writer’s “occasional reference to the West”, and in her comparison of “Somali women to Antigone, Medea and Mayfair products and Ahmed Abdullahi to Robeson. “Occasionally”, he adds, “she uses the Bible apparently because it helps an audience unfamiliar to Somaliland to comprehend what she is talking about” (1). As this observation suggests, some of the elements which Laurence incorporates in her narrative

do not necessarily occur in her experiences but in those of his imagined readers. Such are like the comparisons referred to above, which mirror the experiences of her imagined readers in contemporary Europe and America. Hence Laurence creates what Smith calls fiction of the imagined reader.

However, to simply assert that Laurence's projected audience in The Prophet's Camel Bell is the West is to oversimplify a significant matter. It posits the question whether Laurence was writing for the very broad Western society or for some particular section of it. It is also valid to ask why Laurence could not write for the Somali.

In trying to fathom these questions, we need to note the particularity of the timing of The Prophet's Camel Bell. The book was written in 1962, a whole ten years after Laurence had left Somaliland. This period also marked the climax of the struggle for liberation from colonialism in Africa. In Europe there was at this time a vibrant anti-imperial movement which was pointing out the inhumanity of colonialism and questioning the role of their governments in the colonies. With its fervent affirmation of the humanity of the Somali and castigation of the imperialists, The Prophet's Camel Bell appears to have been written to contribute and play to this anti-colonial movement. Therefore we can more specifically point to its audience among the anti-imperial section of the Western readership.

Writing an autobiography is an art rather than just an exercise in egocentric documentation of one's life. The autobiography is an organized narrative and it has to form a unity of

sequence and of meaning, even if the life of the autobiographer whom it portrays does not. Since the discourse demands organization, the autobiographer has to derive an organizing principle through which to create meaning and logical sequence in the work as he recalls from his fragmented experience. The organizing principle in The Prophet's Camel Bell is the sequence of the writer's journey. Her journey follows the classical triadic paradigm of departure, adventure and return. We follow Laurence's journey from the moment she departs from England, through its course in Africa, and to her return to Europe. The effect of this journey as the organizing principle is discussed later in this chapter.

The autobiographer has to pay attention to artistic conventions and traditions like all other prose writers. His selection and presentation of materials has to adhere to the patterns of the genre. In this engaging process of selection and presentation, the autobiographer may find himself compelled to reshape and conventionalize his life in order to fit literary preconceptions. Therefore, what we follow when we read an autobiography like The Prophet's Camel Bell is not necessarily the life cycle of the autobiographer; it is most probably the artistic life - cycle of the work. Thus, the artistic life cycle of the work may create a fiction of that of the autobiographer.

However, good autobiographers know that adherence to literary conventions must not obscure one's personal meaning of his life or his perceptions of life in general. The autobiography is not just a transcript of personal feelings and experiences, it is a

presentation of these in a manner which both expresses personal values and interprets the human condition. The autobiography can therefore be seen as a problematic genre which at once attempts to harmonize the life-cycles of the author and the genre as well as respond to the pressures of the narrative and those of the projected readers. This evaluation of The Prophet's Camel Bell is aware of this problem. It is equally conscious of the sea-saw existence between the demands of accurate self-representation and adherence to literary conventions. Just as autobiographies need careful craftsmanship to produce, they need equally discrete criticism to evaluate. Not every expression in them should be taken as literal truth. Each work needs to be examined in the light of the complex context of the latent personal and artistic tensions that condition its production.

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, The Prophet's Camel Bell can also be seen as a travel-book. It describes a journey and recollects an experience which was acquired in the process of traveling. At the opening of the narrative, Laurence portrays herself as a traveler confounded by the anxieties of setting out for the unknown:

Nothing can equal in hope and apprehension the first voyage east of the Suez, yourself eager for all manner of oddities, pretending to disbelieve in marvels lest you appear naive but anticipating them just the same, prepared for anything prepared for nothing, burdened with baggage ... unburdened by knowledge, assuming all will go well because it is you and not someone else going to the far place ...
(9)

Human history abounds with examples of people who moved from their native lands to trade, work and explore in distant lands. Many of these travelers remained mute, while

others, gifted with higher sense of involvement, at least managed to record how they were received or repulsed in the lands where they sojourned. There is therefore a vast literature of travel which dates, perhaps, as far back as the human ability to move, and The Prophet's Camel-Bell belongs to this tradition.

In her essay entitled "African Journeys" published in Research in African Literatures, Mildred Mortimer explores some fundamental issues regarding travel and its representation, such as the purpose of a journey from one place to another. She gives various reasons why people travel, both in fiction and in real life: "Some journeys are adventures, whereas others are forced marches; a traveler may be a tourist seeking exoticism or an exile in search a new home..." (169). But Elisabeth Mudimbe - Boyi in another essay entitled "Travel, Representation and Difference, or how can one be a Parisian," published in the same journal, gives the journey a spiritual and psychological dimension: "... the journey assumes multiple meanings and goals: it can be a spiritual or psychological quest, an initiation to the world and to a knowledge of the self, an escape, a conquest, or a discovery" (26).

These observations identify two processes of journeying: a physical process which involves the shift from one place to another, and a psychological process which involves acquisition of new, greater awareness. The processes may be simultaneous in that as travelers physically move from their home environment to foreign lands, they at the same time cross a frontier between the familiar and the unfamiliar. In The Prophet's Camel Bell

for instance, apart from the physical journey which Laurence undertakes from Europe to Somaliland we can identify another journey within. There is a psychological process, a spiritual voyage, which brings her into an awareness of the Somali and of herself.

The book opens with a powerful image of a traveler. It presents us with the confounding state in which travelers to the unknown find themselves. For Laurence, setting out to Africa is both daunting and confounding. She has heard many fantastic tales about distant lands and she is not sure how to respond to them: whether with fear lest they be true, or with intrepidity lest she appear naive.

Her journey therefore begins from a point of anxiety, fear and naivety. It is not only a journey into an hitherto unfamiliar continent but also one into knowledge. It is an educative journey in which she will encounter and learn not just the distant lands and unfamiliar people of Somaliland, but also herself. She will later recognize and shed the fantasies she holds about this land, the pretenses through which she has lived, and see clearly the reality both of the land and the people among whom she is traveling as well as of her own self.

Therefore The Prophet's Camel Bell represents traveling in more than the ordinary sense of moving from one place to another. In another sense, it represents a psychological journey in which Laurence, a psychic traveler, moves towards better understanding and greater respect for another people and another culture. It represents also at this level

Laurence as a spiritual explorer who, motivated by her contact with unfamiliar people and culture, delves into an exercise of self-searching and thus moves towards an understanding of her inner self.

This self-searching exercise involves a simultaneous process of self-assessment and critique, in the manner of an uncertain traveler who takes wrong routes and has to retrace his steps to find the correct ones. Throughout the story, Laurence readily admits her inadequate understanding of the Somali. She acknowledges and owns up her self-deception about the people and herself, and is always ready to amend her attitudes.

In this work Laurence is also traveling on a third level. She wrote the book almost ten years after she had left Somaliland and many miles away from the country. Her perspective had changed markedly with this shift in time and place. In the text we can mark this change as represented by her use of “now” and “then”, such as when she makes this observation on Abdi, one of their Somali workers:

After a number of years, things do not look quite the same. I recognize now, as I did not dare to do then, how eagerly I listened to what I felt to be his admiration ... (207)

Elsewhere she says, “Even the words which we at first took as compliments and then as unscrupulous flattery, now seem to have been neither ...” (209). Through the years her perspective on their relationship with Abdi has changed as she realizes now when she

looks at it with the benefit of hindsight. There is a vast distance of time, place and consciousness between “then” and “now” which she must travel imaginatively.

We can therefore see The Prophet's Camel Bell as a journey back in memory, in which Laurence imaginatively retraces her steps back into Somaliland and into her youthful years. This journey, as the case of her view of Abdi exemplifies, involves re-visioning and re-interpreting her experience of Somaliland, as she looks back at the country, the people and the years through a narrowing physical and temporal distance.

However, all these levels of traveling are simultaneous and do not complicate Laurence's story-line which is clear and easy to follow. Initially, the narrative, develops on a linear pattern along the route of the journey which the writer is making: by sea from Europe via the Mediterranean and Egypt to the Horn of Africa, then on land into the interior of Somaliland. Later, when she has settled in the country, the narrative becomes more sedentary, representing her observations and encounters as she acquaints herself with the land, its people and flora and fauna.

In the text the narrative is divided into fifteen chapters which, in their division and succession, represent various stages of the journey. In the first three the events are arranged in a chronological order as they occur along the route of the writer's journey. Along this route, she leads us from one place to the next, keeping us on the ship or vehicle she is traveling on, and halting us where they halt on the way. She occasionally stops to

observe, describe or analyze the physical and social aspects of the places she is passing through such as Genoa or Port Said, Egypt.

From the fourth chapter where the writer has arrived in Somaliland and settled at a place called Sheikh, what has hitherto been a journeying narrative transforms to a more sedentary observation and description of various subjects: the country, Jack Laurence's work, the writer's experience of the European community in the country and her encounter with the Somali and their culture. This yields into a topical division of the narrative into distinct chapters each of which deals with a particular subject. Whereas the preceding three chapters are presented in the successive order of the journey, from the fourth the narrative becomes more episodic, relating events and observations which do not follow a strict chronological pattern but which may have elapsed between one event and the next.

As this outline indicates, The Prophet's Camel Bell consists of a simple narrative which has no recognizable central plot. Externally it consists more or less of a series of episodes some of which have no real causal relationship. However, the story has a deeper plot which can be subtly recognized at the level of Laurence's consciousness.

While traveling in Somaliland, Laurence is at the same time making a journey into the self and into the Somali culture. This journey begins from a point of naivety and ignorance. Then as she encounters the Somali, we begin to see a shift in their consciousness.

Whereas she was not sure how to view the people and their land, we see her beginning to grasp the meaning of life for these tribesmen and to understand the imperatives of their harsh desert conditions. In addition, whereas she at first looked down upon all the white people in the country as “imperialists”, she begins to fathom the condition of their lives in this country and to accept that some of them are different. She also begins to look inwardly at herself, her own culture, and to understand the condition of human life as these encounters motivate her to search her conscience.

Subsequently, as Laurence experiences the harsh conditions of life in this land, she becomes more and more aware of the intense realities of life for the Somali. Also as she encounters their substantially different culture she becomes more and more aware of the strangeness of her own Western perspective to the Somali. Ultimately, when she leaves the country after two years, she has achieved a better understanding and greater respect for the Somali, and more sympathy for the white expatriates in this country, some of whom, she realizes, cannot be neatly labeled as “imperialists”. She learns to see people as human individuals rather than as race categories.

Hence this inner plot of The Prophet's Camel Bell takes the same triadic structure of departure, adventure and return as the writer's physical journey. The plot can be summed up: Laurence sets out for Africa naive, ignorant and full of anxieties. She encounters the Somali, their country and the European community in Somaliland. Her attitude towards others and herself changes, and she achieves a more lucid grasp of the country and its

people and more maturity in her disposition towards others and herself. She also gains a better understanding of the human condition and has more respect and sympathy for others. Her vision widened and her consciousness enriched, she leaves Somaliland considerably grown in personal stature than when she came.

However, it must be noted that The Prophet's Camel Bell does not describe this psychological process which takes place in relation to the writer. It remains something that can only be subtly experienced with Laurence's physical journey in Somaliland. The significance of this physical journey in the overall accomplishment of the narrative has been noted earlier. In the absence of an external plot, it is the sequence of the writer's journey which serves as the narrative's organizing principle. The story begins and proceeds with the writer's journey, and ends at the point where she leaves Somaliland. This broad parallel with the writer's journey therefore creates a sense of unity, coherence and continuity in the narrative.

Moreover, the journey gives the work a sense of motion. The physical movement from place to place is simultaneous with Laurence's subtly shifting consciousness and her growing knowledge of the Somali and their land. Therefore in this physical movement is hidden a subterranean process of the writer's psychological movement towards a better understanding of the Somali and of herself. It is the fusion of these two movements which gives the work its remarkable sense of dynamism.

For the reader of The Prophet's Camel Bell, as it is for the author, this story is a journey into the unknown. It is an exploration which arouses interest and expectation as we set sail with the writer to encounter and discover. In our synchronized journey with hers, the writer's discoveries become our discoveries, and her surprises and frustrations ours too. This effect is made possible by the fact that the story is told in the first person. As both the sojourner and the I-narrator, Laurence controls our point-of-view such that we see, feel and encounter only what she does. This autobiographical point-of-view therefore involves us fully and actively in the writer's realization of life in Somaliland and in her process of self - affirmation.

At the same time, the autobiographical rendering brings us close to the story, making us not only witnesses but also first hand participants in the unfolding journey. This method conveys her experiences to us with immediacy and enables us to identify and sympathize with her view of life in this country. Because we see the Somali world through Laurence's eyes, it looks to us as it does to her. For instance, when she scorns the English memsahibs at Hargeisa for their undue contempt towards the Somali, we come out in full agreement with her, for it is through her eyes and ears that we discover the pettiness and snobbery that characterizes this women's lot. As she leads us into their world, she simultaneously sifts it through her own perspective and therefore we can only respond to the memsahibs as Laurence conditions us to.

The autobiographer's control of the narrative also enables Laurence to either enlarge her perspective to give a panoramic representation, or narrow it to focus on particular significant events or moments. She is also able to choose either to limit the story to the directly experienced encounters -- those which occurred along the line of her journey -- or incorporate other experiences known to her through secondary contacts. The autobiographical narrative can be limiting in that it tends to restrict the story to the visual, dramatic or the directly experienced. However, Laurence liberates her story from this hemming - in effect by incorporating stories recollected to her by other people. Examples of these include the story of the Somali nationalist, Mohamed Abdulla Hassan or the "Mad Mulla", which was told to her by the Colonel (239 - 240), and the story of 'Il Capitano's' adventure in the Danakil country, Ethiopia, told to Laurence by 'Il Capitano' himself. The individual chapters on Hersi, Mohamed, Arabetto and Abdi also contain a lot of information on these individual's personal histories which was no doubt handed down to Laurence by themselves.

Laurence also weaves historical and anthropological information about the Somali and their country into the story. She extensively discusses Somali art and its role in articulating the cultural essence of the people (210 - 223). She also explores their attitude towards love and women and their customs regarding marriage and conjugal relationships, which she fruitfully compares with her own culture's (101 -106).

This strategy of incorporating into the narrative historical and anthropological information on Somaliland and stories told to Laurence by others gives The Prophet's Camel Bell a vastness and vitality not ordinarily possible in an autobiographical work. It enriches the story, at once imparting to it the qualities of creative work as well as of an ethnographic document. Therefore while the story is interesting to read as a work of art, it at the same time disseminates useful information on the Somali and thus enhances our understanding of the people and their way of life.

Laurence writes in a skillful expository prose characterized by a flourish language and full and elaborate descriptions and analyses. In writing this retrospective work, she is rendering not just a simple external experience but an intense, crowded and composite life of the mind. She is putting down a comprehensive introspective consciousness, and her narrative process therefore involves at once remembering and interpreting, observing and analyzing. Representing such composite experiences and observations results in a prose of dynamic and usually prolonged parenthetical sentences which bring together many appositional elements. A sample of sentences from any part of the text would prove this observation true.

The writer's prolonged, lyrically embroidered sentences create a profound impression of the writer's singular prose composition abilities. The passages, written with the lyrical flourish of descriptive poetry, display a remarkable fluency and clarity of language as well

as a fine grasp of the prose idiom. In their accentuated tones and imagistic language, they produce very vivid descriptions.

Due to her fine grasp of the prose idiom, the rhythm of Laurence's narrative is never dashing or abrupt, even in its most emotional scenes. The lengthy sentences and flourish language yield a paced and measured delivery of the narrative, as if the story is not being told but is drifting across to readers as they journey with the writer. The paced rhythm of the narrative is also finely adjusted to the slow and prolonged movement of Laurence's journey.

There is a relationship between this narrative pace and effect. The paced momentum of the narrative produces an effect of deep realization, of slow but profound revelation, rather than a quick impactful surprise. This allows the readers to reflect deeply and seriously on the narrative and on Laurence's experiences and perspective. The achievement of the whole narrative method, therefore, is that it gives us a gradual and sustained revelation of the story's meaning.

The Prophet's Camel Bell, we realize, is a book about human and cultural relationships. It explores the contact between the Somali and European expatriate communities in Somaliland, and how these reflect on human and cultural relationships. The relationship between the Somali and the expatriate community in Somaliland manifests the universal diversity of human cultures, and the cultural divide which inevitably exists between people

of different races, which they must try to bridge for more harmonious relations. Human diversity, Laurence realizes, can either inhibit or enhance human interrelationships.

At the same time Laurence explores the cultural existence of the Somali as it manifests in their religion and folk literature. Of special interest in her work is the responses of the Somali culture and religion to the severe desert milieu in which they live. In addition, she is keen to ascertain the validity of the expatriate community's conception of the Somali and their cultural attitudes.

The cultural dividedness between the Somali and the European community, she finds out, is an inevitable consequence of their experiences. More importantly, she establishes that the Somali way of life is patterned by the intense demands of their severe desert milieu. Their religion, Islam, which the expatriate community dismisses as unduly fatalistic, is a necessary response to this desert environment. In the oral literature of the Somali, she finds the resplendent expression of a people who are proud and dignified in their way of life, however different it is from her accustomed Western way of life.

The reality of the cultural divide between the British expatriates and the Somali tribesmen first dawns on the writer when she encounters Alf, the PWD foreman in Berbera and the first Englishman she meets in Somaliland. Alf is a "plain and practical man" (27) who is genuinely interested in the good performance of his work and in establishing a good

relationship with the Somali. However, he often finds himself at cross-purpose with tribesmen and is perplexed at the mutual incomprehensibility between themselves:

What did the road gang mean when they complained that the headman was like a hyena in the dry season? ... Did Abdillahi really understand the gear-shift on the new three-ton, or did he only claim to understand, thinking it best to be agreeable? Who was the weird old bearded geezer who had come along and talked non-stop for an hour yesterday, and why had he presented that petition on behalf of Omar, sacked three months ago? (28).

He talks to the Somali in the terms of his own culture, but they understand him in the terms of their own, he talks to them in terms of one experience, but they respond in the terms of quite another. They can hardly understand his world-view, neither can he theirs.

Although Alf is well meaning and genuinely interested in establishing good ties with the tribesmen, the cultural chasm between his experience and theirs always comes to bear on their relationship: "He wanted to show them how to look after machinery, how to build and repair roads. Why wouldn't they let him?" (27). What he misconceives as the "Somalis' obstructionism" (27) is actually an inability, a much on his part as on the Somali's, to reach out for each other across their cultural divide and to reconcile their mutually different points-of-view.

Unfortunately, Alf has no gift for such analysis. As a plain and practical man whose "business was with solid and tangible things" (28) he is more apt to understand the mechanics of his machinery than the dynamics of human interaction. In his lack of

analytical power, he probably expects Ali and Farah -- his driver and his mechanic -- to respond to his overtures with the mechanical promptness of his Landrover or the three-ton truck. He fails to realize that, owing to their experiences, Ali and Farah have ingrained in them -- as has Alf himself -- a certain cultural consciousness which is not easy to breach.

Later, after her own experience with Somali workmen in Jack's 'baleh' project, Laurence quite correctly comments:

The blunders made by the Somali drivers were not done on purpose, as many Englishmen here believed, nor did they indicate any lack of intelligence ... They were simply the actions of men who had virtually no mechanical experience. How would we have fared, if we had been given a dozen camels and told to wrest a living from the desert? (153)

In his personal experience from his childhood, Jack Laurence reinforces this view. He reminisces:

I remember, as a kid, taking an old Model - T apart and putting it together again ... I was always tinkering with radios -- all kinds of things like that. But men like Ali Wys and Omar Farah learned as kids how to throw a spear and how to recognize the tracks of their camels in the sand (153).

There is therefore a vast and fundamental difference between the Somali and the British in terms of their cultural experiences and the accumulated knowledge which has been handed down within their respective cultures. This knowledge is relevant and suited to the milieu and survival requirements of each people. Therefore the Somali should not be seen as

inferior human beings because they lack knowledge of the machines, which in any case, is not necessary in their desert environment. This is the fault which Laurence deplores in Alf and other English people in Somliland. In failing to see the Somali within the realm of their environment they deny them their culture, and in denying them their culture, they deprive them not only of their identity as Somalis but of their humanity as well.

As Laurence suggests, "... in trying to turn camel herders into truck drivers, desert tribesmen into town-dwelling mechanics," Alf "...was trying to construct a bridge that would cross centuries and oceans in a single span" (28). Laurence's argument here is that cross-cultural bridges are not easy to construct. They are, however, necessary for harmonious human interaction, and she is convinced that with mutual understanding, patience and goodwill, they can be constructed and greatly enhance interaction between people of different cultures. This is one of the major thrusts of The Prophet's Camel Bell.

Exposed to the cultural conflicts in this country, Laurence begins to understand the essential nature of human cultures. She realizes that human cultures are necessarily varied because they respond to different types of environment. The Somali way of life, their attitudes and spiritual disposition have evolved in response to the harsh physical conditions of their desert surroundings. The severely arid condition of this land, with its macabre potential for sudden, violent transformation from drought to floods, has compelled them to lead a hardened and materially meager nomadic life. However, the British people in Somaliland have been accustomed to the ample provision of their culture, and the Somali

way of life therefore appears unduly ascetic and fatalistic. But Lauence does not look at the Somali way of life from the vantagepoint of her Canadian upbringing, which would be wildly irrelevant here. Rather, she tries to see it from the perspective of the harsh desert environment of their country. She is fully conscious of the dire physical demands of this environment, and she tries to understand the Somali way of life in this relation.

Islam, the religion of the Somali, clearly demonstrates the people's spiritual response to their environment. In their faith, the Somali surrender their entire lives to divine control and determination. Even when they have clear opportunities to improve their condition or to prepare for eventualities, they do very little. For instance, in the sun-baked plains of the Haud, at the peak of the life-sapping *Jilal*, the dry season, Jack recalls how he met Somali families beginning long treks across the desert without even caring to carry spare drinking water:

I know they couldn't do very much in the situation, the slight precautions they could have taken simply weren't done. I met one family beginning a hundred-and-fifty-miles trek across the desert, and only twenty miles away from the Awareh wells they were already out of water, or hadn't taken any with them (58).

Tutored in the self-reliance ethic of his culture, he is puzzled by this "apparent improvidence of the Somalis" (58). But Hersi, driver and a man of the desert, has a completely different point-of-view. "You see sahib," he explains, "it is no greatly use for them to taking water. If Allah wanting them to reach the Hargeisa wells, they get there. If not, they die" (58).

This fatalistic attitude at first is incomprehensible to Laurence, but as she gains a first-hand experience of the dire condition of the country, she begins to recognize an environmental and cultural embeddedness in it. She begins to understand the relentless forces that have forged this attitude:

Gradually we began to see why Islam is a religion of the desert. Even had the tribesmen taken full water vessels with them on their trek, it would have made little difference in the long run. Some would still have died on the way and some would have reached the wells. The Somali tribes had always been dependent upon moving from place to place, seeking grazing for their herds and flocks, dependent upon brackish pools of water hundreds of miles apart. When they had watered their animals and filled themselves with water, they moved on to grazing ground where there were no wells. This was the inevitable pattern of their lives (59).

From such contemplation Laurence realizes that a people's spiritual consciousness, as their culture, develops and lives in their environment. She therefore tries to understand the spiritual consciousness of the Somali as it occurs within their desert milieu. For these people whose lives are mercilessly held by the desert in its arid grip, notions of self-reliance such as Jack enunciates can only be wan and insignificant against the vicious forces of nature. Hence, rather than waste themselves in self pity and despair, they are more inclined to submit to Allah the merciful, and to trust in his divine control and determination.

Laurence's background in a scientifically-oriented culture has not prepared her for a situation that demands total submission to God. The Christian ethic of "Trust in the Lord

but keep your powder dry” (58), she finds out, has little application in a situation where the precautions of man are puny against the extreme vagaries of nature, such as it is in Somaliland during the Jilal. However, her Christian background notwithstanding, her approach to the Somali mode of faith is completely without prejudice. She espouses a liberal disposition towards religions -- a believe and let believe stance -- which goes a long way to enable her appreciate the faith of others. She therefore understands that the Somali maintain their Islamic faith because the faith maintains them in turn.

Laurence faults the British colonizers for attempting to impose their religion on the Somalis, which indicates their insensitivity to the spiritual needs of the tribesmen. To a people as often and as severely afflicted by natural disasters as the Somali, religious faith is not a matter of luxury or a choice for political advantages. It is an intense reality, because “They lived in the palm of God’s hand. If this hand crushed them so be it. Only in this way, in this land, was the heart saved from breaking.” (64) Islam not only rationalizes the severe tests of life to the Somali but it also gives them hope, courage and determination to go on when others would simply give up.

Through her contemplation of the Somali religion, Laurence comes to a profound understanding of the influence of the physical existence of a people in shaping their culture and spiritual disposition. It is because of this understanding that she avoids judging others’ culture and religion which have been shaped by circumstances she is not entirely familiar with. She therefore knows the folly of foreigners expecting other people to act

and think like themselves. This is the folly she finds and deplors in the English expatriate community in Somaliland.

The English expatriates regard the Somali as a backward, insensitive people who are there only to be governed. They look down upon the people, their culture and everything the country has to offer. On arriving in the country, Laurence immediately notes the social distance which this expatriate community maintains between themselves and the Somali. They do not just keep to their own segregated residential quarters and club which are “a considerable distance from the ‘magala’ or Somali town” (30), they hold it as socially incorrect for European women to wander to the ‘magala’ alone. This social and physical distance between the two communities also manifests the material disparity between the Somali subjects and their British overlords.

The English people treat the Somali patronisingly or contemptuously, as these “pieces of advice” by what the English memsahibs tried to initiate Laurence to Somaliland indicate:

Always lock the storeroom door, or you will be robbed blind by your servants. Never lock the storeroom door, or your resentful servants will find other ways to pilfer food. On no account be so foolish to advance pay to your cook or house boy, for it encourages them in financial carelessness. It is quite acceptable to advance pay provided they understand clearly how much is to be paid back each month ... Never hire a Somali ayah to care for children; such girls all have loose morals -- otherwise as Muslim women, they would not take employment. (31-32).

In their contradiction and lack of unanimity, these “pieces of advice” reveal the confusion and pettiness of the memsahibs who hand them down, and Laurence treats them with due scorn and skepticism. But looking back at these women later, she begins to understand the real circumstances surrounding their lives in Somaliland -- the extreme boredom in which they lived, the emptiness of their lives, their shaky social position in this country -- which rationalize their disposition towards the Somali. She reminisces:

At the time, I only saw the distance which they put between themselves and the Somali, who they tended to regard either patronizingly or with outright scorn. I did not appreciate then the really desperate boredom of some of these women, the sense of life being lived pointlessly and in a vacuum. Nor did I perceive the need many of them felt to create a small replica of England here in the desert, and the enormous effort they put into a task that must inevitably fail (32).

The gratuitous contempt of these English women towards the Somali is therefore only a compensatory measure they have assumed in their desperate and vain attempts to socially actualize themselves. Laurence treats them not with rancour or antipathy, but with a sense of deep sympathy, for this is what they deserve.

In the following passage, quoted here at length because it is the most powerful in the whole work, she represents a set of satirical gaffes which capture the social snobbery and cultural arrogance of this English community. She combines mordant wit and bitter irony to expose the sickening values and attitudes of these sahib-type expatriates:

To this group belonged the sahib who referred to Somalis as “black bastards” except when he facetiously called them “our black brethren”, the memsahib who twittered interminably about the appalling cheekiness of the Somalis; the thin pallid lady who was haunted by the fear (or perhaps hope) that all Somali men over the age of twelve were constantly eyeing her with extreme lewdness; the timid memsahib who lived within the four walls of her bungalow as within a tissue - paper fortress which the slightest breath of Africa might cause to crumple around her. To this group, also, belonged the memsahib who one morning at the Hargeisa club gave the steward a tongue-lashing that would have done credit to a termagant of Hogarth’s day, because he had placed a salt shaker on the table instead of a salt cellar -- “Don’t you know that no lady ever sprinkles salt over her food ?” Another of this ilk was the sahib who, when he was presiding over a district court once, shrilled at each Somali witness in turn -- “You are lying!” -- as perhaps they were, but whether they were or not, they could not risk replying in a tone like his. To this clan belonged the sahib who once ordered the Somali steward at the Hargeisa Club to bring back the magazine which the sahib had been reading and which the steward had put away while the Englishman was out at the bar; the Somali could not read and did not know one magazine from another, but the sahib would not walk across the room to find his own magazine -- the steward was made to trot back and forth until by a process of elimination the right publication was fetched. To this sad company belonged the memsahibs who told gruesome stories over the mid-morning tea -- the Englishwoman whose husband was away on trek and who was awakened one night by an invading shadow which proved to be an African bent on raping her; managing to reach under her pillow, she drew out the revolver she kept there and shot him -- he staggered off into the night and when the servants searched the compound, the man turned out to be the trusted night watchman whom the family had employed for years (227-28).

Laurence deeply scorns these English people for their arrogant, self-important and ethnocentric attitude towards the Somali. She finds them unduly disrespectful and insensitive to other people.

They exalt in colonialism which has given them status and privileges over the Somali, which they would not ordinarily dream of. But she also finds out that their elitism is only spurious for, although they feign abhorrence for Somaliland, in their consciousness they also resent their own homeland, England. Although in Africa they find themselves at the center-stage of social and political activity, in England they have to stick to the back alley and feel insignificant. Therefore in Somaliland they are not just imperialists but also exiles who cannot face the prospect of going back to England.

In her stance against these imperial-minded Englishmen, Laurence reveals her personal moral integrity. She deeply resents imperialism because, unlike these Englishmen, she is aware of the moral implication of the domination and humiliation of a people by another. As a citizen of Canada, a country that was once a British colony, she has her home-grown antipathy toward imperialism. This fact gives poignancy to her feeling about colonial domination:

... my feeling about imperialism was very simple -- I was against it. I had been born and had grown up in a country that once was a colony, a county which many people believed still to be suffering from a colonial outlook, and like most Canadians I took umbrage swiftly at a certain type of English who felt they had a divinely bestowed superiority over the lesser breeds without the law. My generation remembered the last of the "remittance men", languid younger sons of country families, men who could not have fixed a car nor driven a tractor to save their own souls and who looked with gentlemanly amusement on those who could, men who had believed they were coming to northern wilds and who in our prairie and mountain towns never once found occasion to change their minds (25-26).

Her view of imperialism, as based on her native experience, is very subjective. However, hers is not a purely one-sided subjectivity which obliterates objective reality. Her attitude towards the Englishmen in Somaliland is not one of apathetic indifference because she recognizes that not all of them can be labeled as imperialists. She sees some of them as well-meaning and respectful individuals who have genuine and important duties to perform in this country. She portrays the others as an anachronistic group who have no role to play in Africa except to find a sanctuary for their own self-exaltation and gratification.

Unlike the English imperialists in Somaliland, Laurence makes a sincere and discrete attempt to forge a cultural understanding and goodwill with the Somali. She makes an effort to learn their language, an effort which she describes as “slow going” (51), but which nonetheless is a significant mark of her desire to communicate and cultivate healthy relationships with her hosts. But even much more significant is her research into Somali art, which leads to her landmark translation of Somali poems and narratives into English.

Translating this folk art involves careful research into the history and culture of the people. It also entails learning the deep nuances of their language. As a consequence the writer can enter the Somali world, put herself into the shoes of the people and view life through their eyes. This greatly enhances her perception of and sympathy for the tribesmen. As she sees the world through their eyes, she gains a deep and informed respect for their world-view, something which the dismissive contempt of the other expatriates can never achieve.

Laurence's project on A Tree for Poverty therefore has both a historic and symbolic significance. Historically, it is a landmark in that it is the first translation of Somali literature into English ever. Through this translation Laurence puts Somali literature into world catalogue for the first time. In addition, this project symbolizes Laurence's love for the Somali and respect for their culture. She has described it as "a labour of love" (243). It signifies that Laurence not only respected and valued Somali art but also believed that Somali art has a vitality worthy of appreciation. It marks her attempt at grasping the cultural essence of the Somali and is therefore a gesture for understanding and respect.

In addition to symbolizing her spirit of respect towards others, this project also reveals Laurence's moral integrity in stark contrast with the imperiousness of the other memsahibs in Somaliland. In a sense, the project advances a case for respect against ethnocentricity, jingoism and bigotry.

Moreover, Laurence's research into and translation of Somali art acts as an antidote to the denigratory imperial myths which the expatriate community was propagating against the Somalis. In their bigoted view, the Englishmen in Somaliland see themselves as vastly superior to the Somali in their rationality and virtues. To them, the Somali have no moral sentiment or conscience, neither are they capable of finer perceptions such as love. They also believe that the Somali, because they cannot speak English as well as themselves, are of an inferior mentality. But Laurence's investigation reveals love as one of the two most

passionate and preponderant themes in Somali folk literature -- the other being war. Her project serves to debunk the English expatriates' skepticism towards the human sensibility of the Somali by revealing a people who have a richly philosophical disposition towards life.

Another indication of Laurence's respect for the Somali can be found in a series of individual portraits of her Somali acquaintances and workers which she presents towards the end of the book. In these portraits she describes the individual attributes and experiences of Hersi, Mohammed, Arabetto and Abdi -- all individuals who made personal impressions to her. She describes each of them in close and careful detail, which indicates her closeness with them and her keen interest in their lives. Her attention to each of them reveals a singular interest of a white woman in the personal lives of her subordinates, and this is quite remarkable in a country where people are sharply divided along race lines, and may relate only as master and servant. It indicates her high regard for these individuals, in contrast to the dismissive contempt of the other white women in the country who see Somalis in terms of race categories. She believes in the existence of these people as human individuals rather than tribal stereotypes. They are people with names, places of belonging and personal histories rather than bland tribal representatives. Moreover, she tells us about these individuals with honesty -- not always admiration -- and she confesses her inadequacy when she fails to understand some of them.

The writer's respect and acceptance of the Somali and their culture is further captured in the title of the book The Prophet's Camel Bell. The title is derived from the gift of a camel-bell which one Somali chieftain, Ahmed Abdillahi, presented to Jack Laurence as a sign of the tribesmen's acceptance of his *balleh* project. The project had begun against a backdrop of suspicion by the Somali, who perhaps had learnt not to expect any good will from the *Ingrese*, the British colonialists. The queries of some of their elders indicate their skepticism and apprehension for the project:

“We have heard that the *Ingrese* are going to make *ballehs* in the Haud,” Haji Abu Jibril said ... “What we want to know is -- why are they doing this thing?” “... We have heard,” Haji Adan said, “that the *Ingrese* plan to build large towns for themselves beside these *ballehs*, so that there will be no room for our people there...”

“Some people are saying,” Haji Yusuf suggested, “that the *Ingrese* plan to make *ballehs* and then poison the water so all our camels will die” (42-43).

The scheme, being undertaken upon the assumption that the Somali, who are often hit by severe shortages of water, would appreciate more watering places for their livestock in the desert, is thrown into serious doubt by such aspersions and later by a threat of violence by the tribesmen. It is in these circumstances that Ahmed Abdillahi offers to travel with Jack among the tribesmen soliciting for their support of the project. More than this, he later presents the gift of a camel-bell to Jack, which points to his people's ultimate appreciation of the project.

The title of the book, derived from this Somali artifact and carrying connotations of their religion ('prophet' connotes the Prophet Mohamed, the founder of the Islamic faith) has both a directness and a figurative quality. Right from the outset, it indicates the writer's admiration and respect for the Somali way of life. It also gives the story a Somali world-view, which is what Laurence attempts to evoke in the narrative. Therefore, if Ahmed Abdillahi's presentation of a camel-bell signifies his people's acceptance of Jack's work, the title of Laurence's book suggests her penetration, acceptance of and respect for the Somali world-view.

Both the gift and the title also capture the sense of optimism which runs throughout the story. Laurence continually hopes that outsiders will see the Somali and other Africans in general for what they actually are rather than for what they expect they are. Although the narrative has many incidences of colonial prejudice and hostility, Laurence also tells of many other Europeans in Somaliland who, like herself, have managed to conquer these attitudes. Like Ahmed Abdillahi's gift of a camel-bell, this throws a ray of bright hope into the racial gloom in this country. There is an enduring hope for better relationships between the people of different races, if only they are willing to conquer their ethnocentric biases and respect each others' way of life. The writer's essential point is that it is not the differences between people which matter, but the mutual goodwill and willingness to try and narrow the cultural gaps between themselves. In the end all people, irrespective of their origin or way of life, are human beings and therefore worthy of respect.

In Somali land, Laurence sees a country of severe hardships caused by droughts and aridity which leave very little for the nomads and their herds to live on. There is also the perpetual threat of strife between the clans, which are proud and prejudiced against each other. Yet, above all these human and physiological problems, Laurence does not fail to see that in the country, there is a people with dignity in their culture and livelihood, a proud people who have a system of life consistent with their milieu. In her perception, the Somali show consistent ideals of character dominated by rigorous religious and social discipline. They also have an abounding capacity for heroism and courage, whether against rival clans in warfare, or in facing the rampant vagaries of their desert environment.

Laurence's perception of Somaliland is clearly and radically different from the traditional Western travelers' view of Africa as some dark and unfathomable place full of evil and dark rites. In her portraiture of the country and its people, she clearly defies the prefiguration by other European travelers in Eastern Africa such as Richard Burton. One of the earliest European visitors in this part of Africa, Burton was a conceited and spiteful traveler who believed that his footsteps were the first that really mattered in East Africa, as the title of his book on this journey -- First Footsteps in East Africa -- indicates. He had an extremely low opinion of the Somali, whom he saw as "stupid, dirty and poor Muslims" (PCB, 25).

On her part, Laurence depicts Somaliland with a clear sense of obligation and responsibility. She feels that the people of this country have been misconceived and misrepresented by outsiders who have been insensitive to their values and their unique heritage. There is, therefore, a crucial need for foreigners look at the people of Somaliland in terms of themselves, and to appreciate the Africans' perspective even when it differs with their own.

The Prophet's Camel Bell, therefore, is a singular literary endeavor. It at once documents the empirical realities of Somaliland in the early 1950's and illuminates the moral and spiritual dilemmas and responses of the people who inhabit this land. Besides depicting the Somali and European communities who live in this country, the book also reveals Laurence as a figure in the events of this period. We see her as a traveler and chronicler responding to the physical and social landscapes of this country. She is not simply a transparent recorder of experiences and events, she is also a crucial participant in the human drama that unfolds in the work. Through her narration and comments on the experiences represented in the work, something of herself is revealed. As she always gives the story a certain frame of opinion through her comments, she is characterized as a believer and bearer of certain truths.

As this chapter has shown, Laurence is not simply writing memoirs to put on record a series of interesting observations and experiences, as many travel writers of her time have done. She is presenting a significant social and political consciousness. Her work

enunciates certain values which are desirable and necessary in cross-cultural interaction, and criticizes the absence of these values where we expect them. It is true that The Prophet's Camel Bell presents interesting experiences and events too, but more than this, it relates this to a valid human philosophy that we can identify with.

The Prophet's Camel Bell is therefore both a travel document and a manifesto. It is not only a record of Laurence's sojourn in Somaliland in the period 1950 - 1952, it is also a political pamphlet against the imperial attitudes of the time. Over and above this, it is an anthropological project through which the writer explores and reveals the human world of the Somali, not because she in any way doubts their humanity, but because others doubt it.

CHAPTER THREE

THE IMAGE OF AN AFRICAN GENERATION AND THE NATION OF GHANA IN THIS SIDE JORDAN

This Side Jordan is set shortly before Ghana's independence from British colonial rule. It focuses on two main characters -- Nathaniel Amegbe and Johnnie Kestoe -- an African and a European, who are caught in conflict with their social surroundings and with the force that patterns this novel's process -- Ghana's approaching independence. The story revolves around the struggle by these individuals to come to terms with their pasts, to liberate themselves from the influence of their heritage and grasp the new circumstances that emerge with Ghana's approaching independence. Through focus on Johnnie Kestoe, Laurence is able to capture the image of European expatriates in Africa while through Nathaniel Amegbe she captures that of a generation of Africans caught at the cross-roads of transition from the past. Together, the two characters enable her to paint the portrait of the nation of Ghana as it emerges from a colonial past onto the threshold of independence.

The process of change and how these individuals respond to it is an important theme in the novel, but Laurence is also concerned with the past of these individuals and how it affects their visions of the future. Of concern also is the race relationship between Africans and Europeans, especially as they perceive each other against the background of their historical contact through colonialism. This relationship is viewed through Amegbe and Kestoe who, like their respective African and European races in Ghana, view each other with suspicion and apprehension. But both come to realize that mutual respect and trust

are essential if they are to cross onto "the other side of Jordan" as they and the whole nation of Ghana look forward to the approaching independence.

Independence -- the symbol of the dawn of a new era -- carries a price for each of them. Kestoe has to realize that he is no longer a privileged white expatriate. He has to descend his high perch of power and privilege, to respect and accept Africans. Amegbe, on his part, has to accept the reality of his people's receding past and embrace his adopted home in the city of Accra, away from his ancestral village. The nation of Ghana has to rise up to the challenge of independence by sealing the seams of ethnicity, and all its people must accept the responsibility of making a new united society. Only this way can they live up to the future which their country's independence holds out.

Although our focus is on the images that Laurence creates through Amegbe, Kestoe and the nation of Ghana, it would be important to first look at some of the formal elements that are significant in understanding the novel. This Side Jordan, as Laurence's first novel ever, was the work that opened up her rich literary career. Although admittedly not as finely accomplished as some of the writer's highly acclaimed literary works, the novel has all the indications of a fledgling but nonetheless great creative potential. Most of this is revealed by the writer's ability to grasp and accurately depict a human condition that is exotic to her. She was resident in Africa for only five years, but she displays a transcendent ability to successfully evoke an authentic African atmosphere in the depiction of the African world of her characters. Her characters, whether from the little

sophisticated village in the Asante forest country or resident in the bustling metropolis of Accra, never fail to convince us of their humanity and their Africanness. It is this fine grasp and authentic depiction of the human condition in Africa that make Laurence's novel successful even in the face of its alleged structural weaknesses, which will be discussed later.

The setting of the novel within a few weeks of Ghana's independence from British colonial rule is significant, although virtually no political activity is captured in the novel. The dawn of independence is an important moment of reckoning and reflection for Ghana's expatriate community, the generation of Africans represented by Amegbe, and the whole country with a fateful history of colonialism. The protagonists, as the whole nation of Ghana, stand at the end of the era of colonialism, reviewing the foregoing years; but at the same time, they stand at the opening of a new era of independence, projecting their visions into the future. Therefore this setting at a crucial moment in the nation's destiny enables the writer to create memorable images of the respective communities and the nation.

In addition, Ghana was the first black African country to attain independence in 1957. It was looked upon by Africans and outsiders alike as the nation in the political vanguard and which must therefore ride the crest of the new wave of nationalism drifting Africa to self-determination. Laurence's image of the nation of Ghana, standing as it does on the threshold of independence, can therefore be seen as her portrait of the whole of Africa.

This Side Jordan is a novel of complicated, almost experimental form. It has a winding parallel plot which simultaneously depicts the lives of two protagonists in juxtaposition. The story of Amegbe, which also brings us into contact with his wife and other relatives, develops alongside the separate but simultaneous story of Kestoe, which on its part, also reveals his wife Miranda Kestoe and his expatriate colleagues. None of these two life tracks causes or anticipates the other, and therefore they essentially consist two separate plots. However, in the end, the writer creates only one rather than two stories in the novel. This is achieved by making Amegbe's and Kestoe's stories to interpenetrate and overlap.

The achievement of this parallel plot strategy in the novel is two-fold. Firstly, by presenting Amegbe's story on the one hand and Kestoe's on the other, the writer gives us enormous opportunities for comparison and analogy between the lives and fortunes of the two protagonists. This is especially significant because one is an African and the other is a European, and racial analogy is thus implied as one of the concerns of the novel.

Although Kestoe is a European and now occupies a privileged position in Ghana, he has had an unwholesome childhood in his native England. He was brought up in an underprivileged community where his people had to struggle for livelihood against enormous social odds. Having had to out-survive each other with dark-skinned

immigrants in London's backwaters, it is Kestoe's childhood experience which ingrained in him his deep resentment for Africans as we find in the novel.

We are, however, meant to see this background in the context of Kestoe's and Amegbe's respective social positions in contemporary Ghana. In contrast with Kestoe's underdog background, Amegbe is the son of the Kyerema -- the drummer to the King of his proud Asante people -- and therefore belongs to the royal lineage of his tribe. But their contrasting backgrounds notwithstanding, the colonial situation with its race - based social set-up has inverted their respective fortunes. Because Kestoe is a white man, he now belongs to Ghana's privileged expatriate class while Amegbe, in spite of his royal lineage, belongs to an impoverished, humiliated group of African urbanites. Whereas Kestoe is a responsible executive in the Firm confident and proud of his social standing, in Accra, Amegbe, on the other hand, is an under-paid school teacher who is always embarrassed of his insignificant standing in society.

Therefore through this contrastive juxtaposition of the lives of Kestoe and Amegbe, the writer enables us to compare and analyze the origins and subsequent fortunes of the two protagonists. In so doing, the writer shows the inversionary effects of colonialism, which is therefore depicted negatively.

The second achievement of this parallel plot, which is closely related with the first, is that it conveys the essential thrust of the novel as the ultimate unity of human destiny,

regardless of race or creed. It indicates that although people may live and develop separately in their social and racial categories, ultimately, as members of the human creed, they must share the same destiny. Kestoe and Amegbe have radically different origins and colonialism put them in separate social categories. But finally, when the structures of colonialism have been over-run, they both come down to their bottom line: they have to reckon with themselves and with each other purely as human beings.

This particular thrust is underlined towards the end of the novel by the birth of babies to both the Kestoes and the Amegbes. The simultaneous birth of these babies, although apparently contrived, signals the writer's wish for a new generation in which people see each other as human beings rather than as Europeans or Africans. The birth of these babies coincides with the receding of colonialism in Ghana; therefore whereas their parents had patronized exclusive European, or African clubs, Kestoe's daughter and Amegbe's son are born in the same hospital as if to signal the end of colonialism's exclusive white or African institutions.

Aya Amegbe would not go to have her baby away in the village among "her people," and neither would Miranda Kestoe in her native England. Both have adopted Accra and accepted Ghana as their new home away from their separate ancestral homes. In Laurence's vision their children, who are indifferent to the racial exclusiveness of their parents, will rise to inherit the new era and new Ghana. They will cross onto "this side of Jordan."

Through juxtaposition of the stories of Kestoe and Amegbe, but especially through their interpenetration, Laurence subtly underscores the inevitable unity of human destiny. She indicates that all of us, whether African or European, are human beings and should grow and live together within equal institutions. The racial and social segregation which colonialism engendered, therefore, is an anathema.

These accomplishments notwithstanding, there is a certain disappointment with the plot of This Side Jordan. It is marred by a preponderant element of fortuitousness in the process of the story. So much of the story's movement depends on coincidence such that there is very little logical causality between one episode and the next. For instance, the crucial contact between Amegbe and the Kestoes is generated and sustained by a series of coincidental meetings in town or at a British Council reception or exhibition. The ultimate conjunction in which Aya Amegbe and Miranda Kestoe meet in the same maternity ward is also coincidental. This aspect of the plot then tends to undermine the apparent realism of the novel.

Besides the plot, another interesting formal element of This Side Jordan is a series of interior monologues given to Amegbe, which are actually the most dominant feature of the novel. These monologues occur as erratic indentations both in the text and in the novel's narrative profile, thus giving it a rather serrated outline.

In his introduction to the novel, Canadian critic G. D. Killam has paid considerable attention to this feature. He notes that a number of Laurence's critics have expressed themselves on these monologues, with some claiming that they find them contrived in that they consist mostly of information which the writer acquired through research into Ashanti traditional customs and beliefs. Although he admits to some measure of contrivance, Killam contents that Laurence has successfully converted her researched information into undeplorable art. He defends these interior monologues thus:

The degree of formality they possess ... is consistent with their content. Speculation on serious religious matters is a formal thing, as is the rhetorical form in which they are cast. More than this, while the musings of Amegbe, sometimes converted into epiphanic vision, derive from his first hand experience of Akan religion when a boy, they also derive from his own research into the history of his peoples. It seems to be natural that his imagination would render them, even under pressure, in the way they do (xvii - xviii).

In the light of this controversy, it is important to look closely at these interior monologues and determine what kinship they bear to the story, of what import they are to the narrative process and to the portraiture of African society in the novel.

In relation to narrative movement, Amegbe's monologues provide still interludes in the novel in which the story does not move forward. Rather than move the story forward they arrest Amegbe in introspection -- sometimes retrospection -- and through these reflections give us insights into his experiences and those of his people. They also reveal his inner emotional and psychological condition.

Amegbe's encounter with his mother-in-law brings about one of these musings. Adua has come to ask him to let Aya go back to their village home in order to give birth among her people as customs require. This request is an affront to Amegbe who has turned his back against his ancestral village and its old tribal rituals. It brings to him the perpetual tug - of - war between the village and the city that rages in his consciousness. In his musing he sees himself wrestling with "Sasabonsam the devil"-- a weird and grotesque apparition that gradually emerges in his hazy consciousness to proclaim itself the city:

-- All night long my spul wrestled with the devil. Yes --
-- My soul wrestled with the devil in the night. The devil of the night. My soul wrestled with the Sasabonsam of the night. His fur was black and his fur was red and his face was a grinning mask of rage. His hands plucked at me, and his breath was evil. He jumped up and down like the great mad gorilla. He drummed on his chest till blood trembled in my heart ... And he cried, "I am the City. Oh yes, I'm the City, I am the City, boy, come and dance!" (74).

Distraught with this devil, Amegbe calls upon his people's gods for protection, but finds all of them dead and powerless against his adversary:

-- Onyame, the shining one, is dead. In the compound where offerings were placed on the altar, only the chickens scratch in the dust. Nyame's Tree is bare. The altar is deserted.
-- Nyankopon, the sun, has died in me and the sun still shines. Odamankoma, the sculptor, He Who Hewed The Thing, he is dead. They say he created Death and Death killed him. It was not death that killed him in me.
-- My gods do not answer. Asaase Yaa, Mother of Earth, is dead with her dead. And Tano lies dead beside his river (76).

But amid all this death and desolation, only Sasabonsam, the devil who proclaims himself the city, lives to haunt Amegbe. Menaced by this devil, but unable to secure protection

from his fathers' gods, the protagonist quickly finds recourse in the Christian saviour, Jesus. He pleads:

-- Jesus my Redeemer, hear me (if you are there.) Jesus my Redeemer, be there. Hear me. For I am drowning. Save me Jesus, I beg you (if You are there).

This long interior monologue takes the form of an eerie dream and constitutes an important element of Amegbe's consciousness. It illuminates the social and spiritual conflict that ranges on in his mind and soul, and which, as we will see later, is characteristic of his generation. We get a sense of his enduring predicament, of the spiritual battles he has to fight and the tough options he faces. Confronted by a formidable and relentless devil in the form of the city he now lives in, he hopes to find sanctuary among his ancestral gods. But, alas, he finds his people's gods invalid and impotent.

Amegbe's predicament at this juncture portrays a man who has failed to fulfill his ancestral covenant. It reminds us that as a young boy he deserted his fathers' shrine for the mission school. Forsaking them then, his ancestral gods also left him. They died in him and now he finds he cannot invoke their power and prowess in his moment of need. He is acutely aware of his eternal debt to his tribe's gods and the village home he deserted. In his enclave in the city, he struggles with the vagaries of an unfamiliar and hostile life, unable to go back to his old home in the village, but at the same time faltering to embrace his new home in the city.

This musing represents the insurmountable dilemma which sets the pace both of Nathaniel's life and of the story in This Side Jordan. It posits several important questions: Why would a man forsake the gods of his fathers? Is one irrevocably bound to his ancestral heritage, or is it appropriate to break ties and accept new ways of life? Does the old village and its tribal ways of life hold any fortunes for Nathaniel Amegbe? Does the old tribal order hold any future for Ghana's independence generation which Amegbe represents?

The monologue foregrounds the crucial choices that Amegbe has to make: between his village home in the forest and the city where he works, between the gods of his ancestors and the Christian King - God, Jesus Christ. It also portrays the menaces that his generation faces and the confusion engendered in their consciousness by a simultaneous attraction to two ways of life. More importantly however, this interior monologue enables us to understand and sympathise with Amegbe's responses to situations arising in his life by giving us a backdrop to his state of mind and actions.

It is also in these interior monologues that we find Amegbe psychologically unraveling the historical encounters of his African people as he tries to grasp the significance of their past and rationalize their current predicament. Some of the monologues are recollections that touch on the devastating imperial experience of his people in the hands of European invaders many generations ago:

-- You Whitemen. You Europeans. You whom we used to call masters. You whom we do not call masters any longer ... You would like us to forget, wouldn't you? You forget -- it is easy for you. But we do not forget the cutting down of the plant, the burning of the plant, the tearing up by the roots.

-- How many centuries' clotted blood lies between your people and mine?

-- I was there. I saw it -- I was there. And the blood trembled in my heart.

-- Doom along the Niger and down to the sea. Doom along the Congo and down to the sea. Doom to all the ports of golden Guinea...

-- Our states broke. Our tribes broke. Each village turned in upon itself, like a man hugging his secret, afraid, afraid, afraid. Who trusted his neighbour? Who could trust even his brother? ...

-- I saw Elmina Castle, with its great stone walls ... In went the bodies, and all of them alive. But not next morning. Not all alive then. Stench of death is in our nostrils and the taste of death is in our mouths...

-- After the slavers, the soldiers. Our land -- overnight, it seemed -- became not ours. Oh, it was paid for. Do not say otherwise. We were paid a few bottles of gin for our land. What did you pay us for our souls?

-- We fought. Our Kings were warriors, and our people. Oh, yes, we fought. Year after year until it was over. We fought with spears. They fought with machine guns. Then it was over (208 - 211).

This monologue bring out some of the outstanding issues in the historical contact between Europeans and Africans. The slave trade, the conquest and the subsequent destruction of African tribes are just some of them. In recalling these spectacles, it is implied that the history of those long ago periods bears relevance to the social and political circumstances at hand. These recollections explain the deep hate for Europeans that Amegbe and his generation wear on their hearts like a brooch. Piqued by being taken for granted by Europeans in their own country, yet recalling what circumstances brought them here, Amegbe and his compatriots can only sate their hearts through hate.

Hence, in casting Africans and Europeans in a historical perspective, this monologue deepens our understanding of the situation prevailing in the novel. As we find Amma and Amegbe and Kestoe apprehensively squaring - off each other, we begin to understand their relationship within the historical perspective pertaining to their people. In this way, Laurence subtly reminds us that the past is an important player in the racial relationships obtaining in contemporary Ghanaian society.

In addition, the references to actual historical events in the monologue in a way helps to enhance the historicity of This Side Jordan. Although these events are more referred to than presented and are therefore not part of the novel, they give a backdrop to the story and form part of its historical context. The mention of events like the slave trade and the Ashanti wars, as well as of personalities like the Ashanti Kings elsewhere in the novel, tends to widen the framework of the novel beyond the limited fictional to the historical.

Nevertheless, it should be observed that history itself has a limited role in This Side Jordan. Although the novel is set within the specific historical period of Ghana's independence in 1957, references to this period or to actual historical players of the time are scanty. More about history in the novel will be discussed in relation to Amegbe who is a teacher and researcher in African history and civilizations of the past.

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The interior monologues are also important accessories to characterization. They help to give background to some significant aspects of Amegbe's character as one of the chief protagonists in the novel. In capturing significant moments in the protagonist's past, the monologues enable us to complete his biographical profile and to understand his reactions to the world around and within him. In the following example, Amegbe poignantly contemplates his childhood and upbringing in the village he later left.

-- When I was a boy, on my father's farm, the forest was peopled with a million ghosts, a million gods. Stone and tree and root, a million eyes. I was not brave. I was slight and small for my age, and my mother had protected me too much. I was not brave. Was anyone? ... The forest was enclosed, shadowy, like a room filled with green shadows. It was my home. The voice of the forest was shrill all day -- a million million bees, a million million cicadas, a million million screaming birds. And at night the silence of the snake.

-- The farms were hewed and hacked out of the bush ... The cocoa trees grew richly, with their pale brown-stained trunks and yellowing pods. The cassava grew, and the guinea corn, and the yams with leaves like elephants' ears.

-- It was not so bad, when I was young. I did not know I would ever leave, then. I did not know that soon the mission school would give me a new name and new soul. It wasn't so bad. At dusk we used to go back home, running through the green tunnels. We used to come out onto the road the Whiteman had forced through the forest, the great road. And there was excitement !...

-- It wasn't so bad, it wasn't so bad. But I always wanted to know where that great road went, and what was at the other end (105 - 106).

Overcome by his curiosity to find out what lay beyond the frontiers of his forest village, the young Amegbe took off to join the white man's mission school where he was given a

new name, a new religion, and began a new life. The road of his curiosity led him further away from his people into the city of strangers, only for him to later regret his lost Eden:

-- If I had stayed a boy on my father's land. If I had stayed a boy in my father's village, clearing in the forest, huts of mud and grass...
-- I would be happier and not happier. No fumbling, no doubt, no shame... Only sweat and the forest, and at night songs and love. That was Eden, a long time ago... (167).

These monologues express Amegbe's deep-seated sentiments about his past and how events in that past changed his life. His fears and regrets for long lost opportunities as well as the uncertainty this has precipitated in his life are clearly brought out. Not only by what they express but also by their manner of expression, the monologues unveil Amegbe's character and deepen our understanding and sympathy for his predicament.

The erratic, disjointed nature of these musings give us an idea of his inner psychological and emotional state. They characterize him as a person who is discontented with his life. His jerky, anxious stream of consciousness indicates a troubled and divided mind and the fact that Amegbe is at all not at peace with himself or with the circumstances that surround his life. Hence, through the monologues the writer enables us to understand more clearly the human aspects and consciousness of her chief protagonist.

Again, these interior monologues are the medium through which Amegbe spiritually reaches out to his past as he tries to understand his identity and selfhood. In his musings

we see him contemplating his childhood, his experiences in the village and in the mission school, as he attempts to grasp his past and revivify his heritage.

His heritage is a complex mix of phenomena like religion, tradition, family relations, race and ethnicity. The monologues render the ebb and flow of his emotion as he encounters these phenomena in his life. With each of these contacts, we see recoiling in him a complex of emotions which, in a sense, define his intricate heritage.

His reaction to the Christian faith, for instance, reveals the complexity of his religious background. In church a conflict of faith takes place in him such that he does not know whether his adherence is to his old tribal gods such as Nyankopon, or to the new Christian Lord, Jesus Christ. This monologue reminds us that as a child he was exposed to both the traditional and the Christian worship, and thus confused and disenchanted with this religious duality, he lost his faith in both:

-- I was of both and I was of neither. I forgot one way when I was too young to remember everything of it by myself without help And I learned another way when I was too old for it to become second nature. Do not question me too closely about God the Holy Ghost, for the meaning is not clear to me. And do not ask me who Nyankopon is, for I have forgotten.

-- Did my father think I could take the red wine of communion and return then to offer red "eto" to the gods? And did the mission fathers think that when I tasted the unleavened bread, the smell of the sacred "summe" leaves scattered in the grove would ever quite be gone from my nostrils? (243).

tends to hamper the development of dialogue and leaves the bulk of the novel's exposition to authorial narration. However, this protagonist who can hardly converse effectively with others speaks internally to himself, and through his interior monologues the novel is saved from monotonous authorial narration

Variation is also achieved through this alternation between the interior monologues and authorial narration. The monologues represent Amegbe's first person impressions of his social situation, and these blend with and supplement the third person perceptions of the omniscient narrator.

The interior monologues are also employed as structural devices in the narrative sequence of the novel. They serve as stylistic bridges to convey the narrative from one point in time or place to another. In his trance-like musings, Amegbe transports us without difficulty from the present to the distant past, from the city of Accra back to the village, or from his adulthood to his childhood. In this instance quoted earlier, he drifts back in time to revisit his childhood in the village even as he faces his uncle Adjei in Accra:

-- When I was a boy, on my father's farm, the forest was peopled with a million ghosts ... I was not brave. I was slight and small for my age, and my mother had protected me too much ... (105).

The monologues, then, are employed like flashbacks that convey us back and forth to places and periods which are significant to our understanding of Amegbe's present predicament. However, as devices for effecting shifts in time and place, the monologues

offer the writer an easier expressive form than flashbacks. Their sequence is freer from the rigors of logical organization since Amegbe's mental - emotional process which they represent is itself disjointed and sometimes illogical.

As technique, the interior monologues help to vary the novel's narrative method and effect. The style of these sections departs -- although sometimes disruptively -- from that of the rest of the text. They are marked by change of tense, such as from the past to the present tense or from the simple past tense to the past participle, where there is a temporal shift in the narrative. The narrative point of view also shifts in many of these sections from the authorial third person to the autobiographical first person. While the third person perspective produces an effect of calm objective detachment from the narrative, the first person perspective in Amegbe's monologues, on the other hand, gives a sensational, dramatic effect.

The effect of this variation is that the monologues, sometimes coming as momentary intrusions in the narrative, tend to lighten the tempo and seriousness of the story at certain points. Because they are characterized by emotional intensity that is not common in the other parts of the narrative, they attract our attention to Amegbe's plight.

Therefore these features are not random occurrences but come at particular significant moments. They occur when Amegbe has a difficult issue to fathom or when he is contemplating an important decision. One such instance is when he faces the difficult

option between protecting his tribesman Ankrah from arrest, and reporting the crime that Ankrah has committed against their neighbour Yiamoo. The choice at hand is essentially one between standing up for his tribe or for his nation. His monologue in which he wrestles with the tribal ethic binding him to favour his kinsman and the counter urge to be faithful to his neighbour and nation is preceded by a deliberate slowing down of the narrative in order to focus our attention on the moment:

Nathaniel stopped. He had been going to say that there were more things and more important things than being of one people. But he knew he could not explain.

“You will not tell?” Ankrah insisted. Nathaniel looked at him, feeling sick(113).

These monologues, then, are actually motivated occurrences rather than just random incidents.

In the light of all these comments, it will be seen that the interior monologues in This Side Jordan are not undue textual incongruities. They are, in fact, stylistic and thematic props that are deliberately embedded in the text. In the way they enhance the thematic concerns of the novel as well as reveal the in-depth character of Amegbe and the spiritual dilemmas that he and his community face, these interior monologues can be seen as foregrounded elements or elements that are stylistically significant. They serve to convey a deeper meaning than the ordinary linguistic reading of the novel.

What, then, is the import of these monologues to Laurence's portraiture of Africa in The Side Jordan? What do they imply of Nathaniel Amegbe, the man whose unarticulated consciousness they capture?

More than anything else in the novel, it is these monologues which reveal and help to interpret the social predicament of Amegbe and his community. In his musing, Amegbe mirrors the dilemma of his age and group. Through him Laurence delineates the image of his generation. This is the generation of those Africans who, like Amegbe, have been drawn out from their tribal enclave by agents of the white man's culture such as the church and the mission school. Socialized in alien values, they no longer bear the tribal identities of their fathers. They neither worship their pagan gods nor accept as home the village of their ancestors in the forest. However, abandoned halfway into the white man's world, they now contemplate whether to complete the journey of absorption, at their own risk, to shamefully beat retreat to their abandoned heritage. They have thrust their backs to their past, but what do they have to look forward to in the future?

Through Amegbe, Laurence captures this dilemma that faces his generation, and the debilitating loss of confidence that results from their uprootedness. In the character's divided and hazy consciousness, she portrays a generation distraught with their struggle against simultaneous attraction to two different worlds. Amegbe's monologues are like poetry of alienation, pouring out disjointed stanza after stanza the plight of a generation

struggling against uprootedness. Although depicted in the novel as an individual, Amegbe represents this collective experience of his age and group.

More than this, Laurence mirrors through Amegbe the crisis of identity that faces the nation of Ghana, as it emerges from the imperial cocoon to find its place as an independent and cohesive nation. Plagued by problems and prone to failure, Amegbe's faltering struggle is reminiscent of Ghana's struggle for a fulfilling nationhood against a background of the receding problems of colonialism and the emerging challenges of independence. As a teacher and researcher in African civilizations of the past he is a repository of his country's history and culture. The drums of the Kyerema, master-drummer to the King of his proud Ashanti people throb in his heart as the stories of Ghana are ingrained in his consciousness. As both himself and his nation stand up to the challenge of independence, it is this proud history and culture that stand to be tested.

The conflict that Amegbe's generation and the entire nation of Ghana face is between traditional ethnic order which the older generation is trying to preserve, and the thrust towards nationalism, individuality and self-determination which the new independence setting engenders. Through Amegbe's consciousness, Laurence reflects on these opposing forces. While Amegbe seeks a national identity and strives to chart the course of his own life, other forces strive to give him a tribal identity. While he espouses the new values he has acquired through his learning and exposure, he at the same time is forced to recognize his African traditions.

A similar situation entails for the nation of Ghana. Attainment of independence and the search for nationhood is attended by serious difficulties in this country where ethnic reckoning traditionally surpasses every other consideration. Hence, there is a threat to Ghana's nationalism posed by competing tribal loyalties.

At this point it is important to examine more closely the circumstances surrounding Amegbe's life in order to understand better how he became an in-between person and how he perceives the socially divisive forces that face his generation and the nation of Ghana. The stage for the conflict in his consciousness was set in his childhood, long before we encounter the distempered adult in the novel. Although born to the royal lineage of his Ashanti tribe, as a child, he left his father's home to attend the mission school. Here he was exposed to new values and new rituals, and the missionaries even took away his African name and gave him a new one:

Before he went to the mission school, he had an African name. He never thought of it now, even to himself. His name was Nathaniel. They had given him that name at the mission school. They always did. They went through in alphabetical order. If he had been the first boy to arrive that month, his name would have been Abraham. After they had given him a different name, they began to give him a different soul (242).

The name Nathaniel therefore does not express his identity, but just indicates an order of English lettering. In this new environment, his identity was taken away as the missionaries tried to supplant another on him. The result was a mesh of confusion as "the new roots

began to grow. But the old roots never quite died, and the two became intertwined “(243). It is this tangle of identity and values that Amegbe is enmeshed in when we encounter in the novel.

Laurence leaves no doubt that Amegbe’s double religious exposure is a significant cause of his confusion. Whereas the mission school managed to stamp its influence on him, it had hardly erased the tribal consciousness deeply ingrained in his mind and heart. As he ate the consecrated bread offered at communion, he also absorbed the teaching that non-believers like his father -- those “who prayed to Tano, god of the River,” -- were damned to an eternity “among the howling hordes of hell” (28). But then his father died, and taking part in his funeral rites, Amegbe surprised even himself that in spite of all those years of exile, he had hardly forgotten the traditional rites of his people.

He had feared, himself, that he might have forgotten. But then he knew there were some things a man never forgets, though they may lie untouched in the urn of his mind for years. The urn is unsealed and they are there, relics of another self, a dead world. Around Nathaniel’s head was bound the ‘asuni’ creeper, whose name means ‘tears’. The rust-hued mourning cloth, colour of Africa’s earth, was twisted around his body. And the lamentation, the ancient lamentation, had risen to his throat unbidden (28 - 29).

Hence, nurtured together in the same man, the influence of Christianity and that of the tribe had blossomed to cause him confusion and tension.

Laurence depicts Amegbe's generation as characterized by this confusing religious duality. As she portrays through other members of his community, religion is a complex and nebulous experience to this generation which has been caught between Christianity and the traditional forms of worship. They are pervaded by a spiritual dissonance and cognitive disjunction between Christianity and traditional religion. Christianity is a new experience to them, and an attractive refuge to the afflicted. But some try to grasp it within the more familiar framework of their indigenous religion.

Aya had said 'hyebea' for command and for God, 'Nyame' ... She thought of it in terms of the faith of the people. The 'Kra', the soul, of some royal sinner, probably David the King, to whose house Jesus belonged, was reborn in that poor boy, that miraculous child, and told to come to earth and perfect itself. And the solemn command of Nyame to the 'Kra' could not be evaded (108).

There are many gods to be worshipped for various purposes in this community's tradition. Hence, in the confusion that attends their attempt to reconcile two different religions, the Christian God is cast as just one of the deities in their vast pantheon.

Even though they barely understand it, Christianity is embraced with zeal, albeit for purposes other than spiritual devotion. To Aya, her church is a fashionable occupation that gives rhythm to her otherwise very drab life in the unfamiliar surroundings of the city. As she finds herself so far away from her people, the church becomes a social place that she attends with her friends in order to at least belong somewhere. She sees herself as a

Christian and would never go to the fetish priests consulted by many of the people; but still, to her, Jesus remains “that Jesus ...that poor boy” (107) and never the redeemer.

It is worse for her friend Charity Donkor who regards herself a Baptist but whose struggle with childlessness has taken her to several of the pagan gods:

...She tried her best with the “abosom” at Koforidua. And she prayed to her husband’s “ntoro” and to Tano, Son of Nyame, who is the god of her people ...Also, Charity is a Baptist, and she said she prayed every day for a child (67).

To her religion is not a matter of fixity but of functional reality. What she pursues is a convenience of purpose, and faithfulness to one god is just not possible. Rather than mind which god to abide in, she only minds which one can deliver. As Amegbe quite appropriately sums her up, “she’s like a woman in the market -- which piece of fish is cheapest, the freshest? Which god shall I buy today?” (68). Similar confusion prevails for Whiskey, Johnnie Kestoe’s African cook, who explains to his mistress: “I no fear ju-ju! ... I fear on’y small small. Madam, I be Methodist!” (90).

However to Amegbe, religion is not a matter of such easy, brazenless wavering between several gods. Perhaps because of his intensely conscientious approach to life, questions of religion evoke in him a complex consciousness, reminding him of the duality of his heritage and his uprootedness. As he reflects on his life he keeps asking himself whether the gods of his fathers may have been betrayed in his heart, or whether his soul may be

lost now because he could not decide earlier to which god it belonged. Is there any salvation for him, over whom both gods fought and both lost?

Ironically, it is in church, which he detests, that Amegbe finally discovers that his unreasonable fear is his undoing. The story of Joshua, the Biblical hero commanded by God to be strong and courageous so that he may lead his people across River Jordan to the promised land, becomes the grand awakening for Amegbe. Listening to this story in church, he finds out that his only undoing has been his fear and hesitance to make that step forward, to break the tether of his past, to cross the River Jordan of his doubts and shame, and to emerge on to a new life. He need not look back to the Kyerema, his father, who in any case set him on the road and freed him to chart his own journey.

In Laurence's perception therefore, salvation does not come from religion or from the gods. It must come from within oneself. One can make a new life for himself and posterity if only he can conquer his fear and shame, and look to the future with confidence.

Another conflict that pre-occupies Amegbe, and which also mirrors the plight of his generation, is with forces that pull him back to the ancestral village which he has abandoned to live in Accra. For him living in Accra represents a transformation from that tribal identity he vehemently seeks to disavow. Compared to the small provincial village in the forest that was his father's home, Accra is a vast and bustling metropolis. It is

portrayed as the meeting and melting point of Europeans and Africans as well as of all the ethnic people of Ghana. Rich in the colour of the country's life as well as in all its human hues and shades, Accra is Ghana in a miniature.

Accra is also depicted as a complex social pit into which various elements of Ghana's diverse nationhood and culture have been thrown together. The night life of this city, which the writer captures in the opening of the novel, gives the impression of a fusion of the old and the new, a synthesis of the traditional and the modern, and an entwining of the African and the foreign. At the popular dance club, "Weekend in Wyoming," white men mesh fingers with African women and sway to the beats of the new highlife music; yet in the background the ancient African drums pound out the old rhythms in nearby villages. In the suburbs of the city, tribesmen who have emerged from their tribal enclaves with rigid prejudices live next door to their traditional antagonists whom, with the coming of independence, they are expected to embrace as compatriots in the new nation.

However, this apparent social fusion is only a facade. Close between all these elements, Laurence reveals deep seated seams of separation and intolerance at both the tribal and racial levels.

In this city, Amegbe hopes to make himself a new place to belong away from his ancestral village. But he finds himself drawn into a whirlpool of confused values and aspirations. He comes up against challenges that thoroughly test his personal values and sense of

nationalism. He is constantly called upon to stand up to either affirm his nation, or proclaim his ethnicity.

One of the most formidable challenges that he has to stave off comes from his mother-in-law Adua Sackey and his uncle Adjei Boateng, who are determined to see Amegbe go back to the ancestral village and live among his people. These two belong to an age-group that still glorifies the tribe and uphold the sanctity of their age-old traditions.

Against them, Amegbe is caught in a generation conflict. Akosua and Adjei belong to an age-group that has rarely ventured out of the tribal cocoon of their village, and their attitudes have therefore been conditioned by their limited exposure. On the other hand, Amegbe's generation has had a wider social exposure, and their liberal disposition is therefore as a result of this experience. The writer depicts these two generations at odds with each other. While Adjei's generation is struggling to preserve the traditional ethnic order in which they have lived, Amegbe's is trying to dismantle this, and to institute an all-encompassing nationalistic order. These two generations are moving in opposite directions, hence the tension between them and their impatience with each other.

Adua, still abiding in the old beliefs that a woman "should bear her child among her own people" (71), is concerned that Aya should not stay through her child-birth in the city of strangers. But her worry is also more than this. To her, "this Accra ... is no good" (72) and she implores Amegbe to go back to the village and live among his own people

Adjei Boateng, calling on ethnic pride and Amegbe's responsibility to his family, also appeals to him to go back. "We are poor people, but loyal to our own" (99), he holds forth, pleading with his nephew to go back to the village where we will work as clerk to the chief. Adjei staunchly believes in the superiority of his Asante tribe, and as he speaks to Amegbe it is not without the feeling that he is reclaiming their son from among lesser people. Ethnic chauvinism comes alive in his words:

Our people are not the apes and dogs of the coast, eating their filth and living godless in caves. We have borne Kings, and their strength gave us strength and their life gave us life. And they are with us, and the strength of their spirits will be as the fire of the sun in our veins -- (103).

However, unlike his uncle and mother-in-law, Amegbe sees himself as living beyond the parochial confines of his tribe. He prides in the newly emerging nation and not the tribe. To go back to the village which he deserted as a child would be an act of retrogression and a betrayal of the nationalistic ideals which he has come to cherish. Rather than do this, he strives to make a new home for himself -- the home of his future -- in the city.

Although he acknowledges the forgone glory of his Asante tribe, its dignified chiefs and proud heritage, he also recognizes so much in this past which he would not care to look back to. "The chiefs, the linguists, the soul bearers, the drummers" belong to this glorious heritage, but so does the shame of "the 'sumankwafo', dealers in fetish, and the 'bayi komfo', the witch doctors ... the minds that made 'atopere', the dance of death, a man

hacked slowly to pieces and made to dance until too much was butchered for him move” (103). How can one look back at the story of his people’s past and not be ashamed by their base rituals as well?

In Accra, Amegbe lives with a creeping sense of shame and fear. Sometimes he is ashamed that in his adopted home he cannot master enough self-confidence as his departed father would in his own. We are shown that unlike himself, Amegbe’s father was his own man, proud in his way of life and never apologetic for his culture. Amegbe, on the other hand, is portrayed as a man dominated by a self-conscious embarrassment and a nagging fear of failure. We often see him wrestling with the consciousness that his ancestral legacy was betrayed in him when he turned away from the village to join the mission school.

This consciousness notwithstanding, Amegbe is determined not to look back. Whatever attractions his past and his tribe offer, he looks forward to the future. He envisages a new life for his people in which the nation rather than the tribe will matter, a life in which people will pride not in their separate identities as tribes, but in their collective destiny as one nation. The past of his Asante tribe, however glorious, has no place in this vision. The fortune of his people, Laurence implies, lies not in that receding past, but in the imminent future and the prospects that the new nation offer.

Daring to face the consequences of his decision, Amegbe firmly declares to his mother-in-law, "I am not going back. This is where I work and where I live" (72). With his uncle, he leaves no doubt that the collapse of the old order is a must: "Our souls are sick with the names of our ancestors ... They are dead, dead, dead and we are alive. Our future does not lie with them, or with the living chiefs, or with Asante alone ..." (103). He is firm in his determination to seek a new identity, and although he may not attain it wholly, he has hope that his unborn son -- his progeny -- will. In fact, his determination that his child should be born in the city rather than in the village is so that he may attain this new identity, and by it, that he may rise to inherit the future.

In depicting Amegbe successfully staving off the threat of the older generation to draw him back into the old ethnic order, Laurence paints the image of a generation which, their doubts and human foibles notwithstanding, has the capacity and determination to rise up to the many formidable challenges of nationhood. With men of Amegbe's courage, there is hope that the nation of Ghana can show its back to the past and chart out a progressive future.

However, there are moments of aberration. The spectre of corruption and the recrudescence of tribalism stare Amegbe in the face even as he proclaims his nationalist ideals. In these social evils lie a formidable trap for the nascent nation, and the fact that Amegbe fails his said test against them is instructive of the need or his people to be careful.

Across the facade of nationalism that Amegbe is struggling to maintain, there appears ethnic cracks which imperil the harmony of the nation. The Asante tribe, priding in its pre-colonial royalty and dominance over the other tribes, finds it difficult to accept equal status with the other people in the nation of Ghana. There are threats that the Asante province will secede from the union. As Adjei Boateng belligerently expresses this spirit, “there is a wind rising in Asante more scorching than the Harmattan. It speaks of fire and it speaks of blood. Asante will once again be what it was” (102). Men like Adjei have attitudes still steeped in the old mentality of “my tribe” and the new landscape of an all-encompassing nation is too vast for them to grasp.

Although Amegbe wins the polemical contest about nationalism against Adjei, the spectre of tribalism unveils itself to him right at his doorsteps. He sees latent ethnic hostility blow out into violence between two of his neighbours, Ankrah and Yiamoo. Ankrah is an Asante and he despises Yiamoo who is Togolander. Declaring that an Akan cannot “take orders from a carrion-eater” (81) he seeks to eject Yiamoo from the verandah where he carries out his business. The fight that erupts between these two men not only reflects the perils of ethnic hostility in this country, but also emphasizes the fact that indulging it could be a recipe for chaos and bloodshed.

Embroided in the conflict between Ankrah and Yiamoo, Amegbe hardly knows whom to support. To report to the police that Ankrah has stabbed Yiamoo would doubtlessly be

the correct thing to do, but then he is afraid of betraying his tribesman who pleads "...We are one people ... Does a man betray his brother? Do you think the spirits of your ancestors would give you any rest ...?" (112-3). In characteristic indecisiveness, Amegbe wavers between faithfulness to his neighbour and countryman Yiamoo, and loyalty to his kinsman Ankrah. However, although he purports to resent the tribal obligation his kinsmen impose on him, he decides to favour Ankrah. "I will not tell," (113) he succumbs.

Amegbe is portrayed here in a moment of aberration; his resentment for tribalism notwithstanding, he decides to uphold kinship. Laurence portrays him as a doctrinaire nationalist, believing in his country and a future free from ethnic imperatives, but hardly prepared for the practical difficulties that lie ahead. Elsewhere, we recognize that his grasp of the nationalist ideal is both vague and shaky. Unlike his friend Victor Edusei, his vision of the nation is more idealistic than realistic.

Laurence presents Amegbe's contrast in Victor Edusei. Edusei is educated at the prestigious London School of Economics, but he is as well adaptive of the simple lifestyle of his people. He is therefore perfectly adjusted to his surroundings. Although confident in his high level of education, he is unpretentious in his interaction with his countrymen. More than this, he is perfectly aware of the challenges of nationhood that await his country. Whereas Amegbe is all upbeat about the coming of independence Edusei sees many problems lurking in this future.

... We're a race of dreamers. One of these days we'll wake up and find that the trains have stopped running -- no one could fix them. We just hope they would keep going by themselves. The farmers will still be using machete and hoe, while the people starve. And we will say in astonishment -- "But it's a rich country -- where is the food?" The city will be pile six feet deep with the backwash from the sewers. The spitting cobra and the spider will be happily nesting in the Assembly buildings, and we will be sitting there gabbling about Ghana the Great --" (52).

Edusei's view of his country is this unromantic. If he is cynical, it is because unlike Amegbe and many of their countrymen, he knows a certain truth about independence. Independence, he implies, is not a silver platter on which riches and rewards are delivered. It is a challenge that the whole nation has to rise up to and conquer. He warns his countrymen against deluding themselves with the glory and greatness of the past, because this past is neither here nor there.

Laurence shows the relevance of Edusei's precaution in Jacob Abraham Mensah, Amegbe's employer, who runs a dilapidated and decaying school. In his sham ostentation, he calls this shameful school "Futura Academy". Poorly equipped and badly managed, Futura Academy is a bastion of exploitation for both students and members of staff. Its extremely deplorable physical state is a good indicator of its shame:

Not long ago the building had been a tenement. Now it was a school. In the damp heat and corroding salt winds, it sagged, buckled, rotted and decayed a little more each year. Warped wooden shutters flapped brokenly at every window, and the

discolorations of time oozed wetly from the walls. It was like an old unburied corpse ... (16).

Yet, in this run-down institution, Mensah dreams of raising young men who can govern the country. He professes responsibility to his people's past and his country's future.

"We are Africans ..." he reminds Amegbe. "We must remember the greatness of the past ... we must remember our responsibility to our past. The great kings -- Osei Tutu, Opoku Ware ..." (61-62).

Mensah is a dreamer who yearns for great achievements and prestige but is hardly prepared to sacrifice for them. He dons ornate suits or flowing African 'Kente', and gorging himself on the glory of old Ghana, expects vicarious greatness for himself, his school and his country. In him Laurence depicts a hypocrite typical of those Ghanaians who pay lip service to their country and its greatness of the past, yet sit back and watch it being consumed by blight and decay. The writer also cautions against the perils of this complacency through Edusei's cautionary words.

Both in his manners and his enlightened views about his country, Edusei is well ahead of his generation. Independence, though welcome progress for his country, does not over-excite him. To him education does not entail sophistication or alienation from his people's way of life. He is rather simple, although sometimes slovenly in manners; and in characteristic eccentricity, he decides to take the illiterate woman Charity Donkor for his wife.

Yet in spite of his strength and integration of character, it is not Edusei but Amegbe who is Laurence's image of Ghana's pre-independence generation. As Micere Githae-Mugo observes in Visions of Africa.

Nathaniel is a very familiar character in Pre-Independence African literature -- a typical product of many mission schools and the kind who "belongs to yesterday and today" in its negative sense ... Moreover at the dawning of Independence, Africa would have had more Nathaniel's than Edusei's (152).

True to this observation, Edusei is more of a mutant element of his generation than a typical representation of it. In all his attributes he contrasts the majority of his countrymen, and unlike Amegbe therefore, he is more of an exceptional than a typical independence generation Ghanaian.

Laurence's enduring image of Africa's independence generation, then, is that unwinsome, reticent, wavering Amegbe. Caught in the conflict between his past and present, and disorientated by simultaneous attraction between two cultures, he is the image of his generation as it stands in the quicksand between yesterday and today, ashamed of plunging back into the unenlightened past of their fathers, but at the same time afraid of breaking the tethers of this past and careering in the uncertain future.

In pre-independence Ghana, Laurence captures the image of an African nation struggling to its feet, determined to move ahead into the future by taking advantage of the

opportunities of independence, but at the same time bedeviled by a perilous tradition of disharmony between its people. With these potentially debilitating problems hanging in the background, the crucial question that arises is whether there is any hope for the future for the nation of Ghana and its pre-independence generation. This is a question we will come back to towards the end of this chapter.

Alongside the images of Ghana and its pre-independence generation, Laurence also paints the portrait of the English expatriate community living in the country. This community is represented by Englishmen working for a British textiles firm in Ghana and their wives, but mainly through Johnnie Kestoe who is the dominant character among them. Living in colonial Ghana where the white race dominates the African, these gentleman and women have cut something of an empire for themselves in the society. James Thayer, Bedford Cunningham and Johnnie Kestoe are powerful and privileged in the Firm where they all occupy senior managerial positions while Africans have to content themselves with the lower clerical cadres. The Firm, with its lopsided race structure, is a microcosmic image of colonial Ghana; it mirrors the domination of Africans by Europeans which obtains in the country.

However, with the dawn of independence in Ghana, the imperial sun is slowly setting for the British Empire and its sons abroad. Concomitant with Ghana's independence, the Firm is to undertake "Africanization", which in the words of Victor Edusei is "the process by which Africans are reluctantly permitted to take over certain administrative posts

hitherto held by Europeans only "(38). The spectacles of independence and Africanization have deep implications for the expatriates who now not only find their privileged positions suddenly threatened, but also face the unattractive prospect of leaving the country. The end of Empire means, to each one of them, an end to the personal empires of privilege which colonialism had bequeathed.

These circumstances offer a rich opportunity for Laurence to capture and expose the personal lives of these people. As they take in the changing circumstances with apprehension, they drop the facades which they had maintained around themselves and we are enabled to view the pallor of their lives. With their images caught in the relentless glare occasioned by independence and Africanization, we realize that these people, far from the confident expatriates they purport to be, are actually imperialists and lacklustre exiles desperate for means of survival.

During her stay in Somaliland, Laurence encountered British expatriates living in the then Somaliland colony and as revealed in Chapter Two of this study, she makes her scorn for this group succinctly clear in The Prophets Camel Bell. She describes them as:

...people who were so desperately uncertain of their own worth and their ability to cope within their own societies that they were forced to seek some kind of mastery in a place where all the cards were stacked in their favour and where they could live in self-generated glory by transferring all evils, all weaknesses, on to another people (226-227).

She sees the attitudes of these expatriates as motivated by the emptiness and uncertainty of their lives. Their views of the Africans around them are therefore not necessarily valid.

Piqued by the insolence of this clique in Somaliland, it is no wonder that Laurence depicts the expatriates in This Side Jordan with the full impact of her satire. Like their counterparts in Somaliland, she sees them as an anachronistic group whose time and role in Africa are long over, but who continue to linger around the continent like “lost dinosaurs” (PCB, 226). Although each one of them is so full of self-exaltation, none has any real work or meaningful role to play in Ghana.

Laurence looks at the world of these expatriates with wry irony. She reveals that their self-generated glory notwithstanding, their lives are full of shame and pettiness. The description of their outward appearances suffices to register the writer’s resentment of this ilk. James Thayer is described as “frail and gnomelike, with tufts of grey hair circling a crown so bare it seemed tonsured. The skin of his face was soft and creased like a piece of chamois.” (7). His wife, Cora, is so pallid and blighted that her face, hair and dress “all were the same colour, the faint yellow of age, like a linen tablecloth tucked away in the bottom drawer of the side-board for half a century” (10). Johnnie Kestoe is described as “thin in a sharp, almost metallic way, like a man made of netted wire upon which flesh has been inadequately spread” (1).

Their unattractive, caricature-like representation mirrors their unwholesome characters and their unduly negative attitudes towards Africans of which Laurence disproves. In representing them in these terms, the writer not only registers her deep resentment for these expatriates, but also creates an ironic framework within which we discern their views about Africa. Whatever disparaging opinions they hold about Africans are invalidated by our knowledge that the expatriates are influenced by the insecurity and emptiness of the lives they lead.

Laurence portrays these expatriates as rank imperialists who are out to perpetuate white domination and exploitation of Africa. James Thayer, manager of the textiles branch at the Firm, and Bedford Cunningham, administrator, vow to see to it that no African rises above the junior clerical cadres. In order to justify themselves, they seek what Laurence calls in The Prophet's Camel Bell "a facile superiority in racialism" (250). They hold Africans in scorn, purporting to doubt their ability to handle the European-occupied positions in the Firm. "I know Africans ...," Thayer brags to Kestoe. "Trustworthy, efficient men who can handle an administrative type of job -- they just don't exist" (91).

Their attitudes are not just racist but also colonial. Rather like mother Britain, Thayer has carved an empire for himself in the Firm. As he prances through the stores contemplating bolts of cloth with authority, it is not without the spectacle of a colonial governor inspecting his territory. Boasting to have single-handedly brought up the textile department, he now feels obliged to protect his domain from encroachment by Africans.

His wife, Cora, contents with creating a miniature of England in her house where she stuffs a motley collection of odds and ends brought in from abroad:

...Big faded English roses were profusely printed on the chintz curtains, and the walls were faded rose, hung with innumerable little watercolors of Windsor Castle, the Lake Country, a Kentish oathouse. The sideboard was crowded with pewter and copper objects -- candle holders, mustard pots, beer mugs, snuff jars. A leather band bearing a dozen horse-brasses was tacked on the wall beside the door ... In one corner stood a grand father clock, its brass pendulum backed with a panel depicting nymphs and shepherds (126).

Cora is desperate to not only to create an English home here but also to keep Africa aloof and insulate herself from local influence. Determined not to be affected by the African environment, she takes her home as a fortress in which she locks herself away from the intrusion of Africa. "Africa shan't enter here. Just this one small place," (126) she declares of her house. As it turns out, however, her desperate tenacity accentuates her alienation from her African surrounding. Unable to reach out to England and at the same time unwilling to adapt to Africa, she becomes, like most of her expatriate colleagues, uprooted and alienated.

Hellen Cunningham's bungalow, far from Cora's fortress of Englishness, is a castle of nervousness and fear of all the innumerable hazards which she sees lurking everywhere in Africa. Constrained for lack of any meaningful occupation, she is resolved to dislike Africa right from the start, and for no specific reason. The country is evil, vicious and

malicious. "It's all in the same pattern," she fretfully explains to Kestoe. "The sea, the sun, the storms, the snake the other day, even the people. Cruel and hard and menacing" (122). In a desperate, if ridiculous show of her distaste for the country, she panickingly tries to shut out the African storm from her home. But Africa maintains a vicious presence around her and simply refuses to be shunted away.

So morbidly obsessed with her fear for Africa, Hellen ostensibly yearns to go back to England. However, the fact that she dares not points to the one salient truth about all these expatriates. The bitter irony about them is that although they all purport to hate Africa and despise Africans, they cling to this country desperately and would never go back to England voluntarily. Their staying in Africa, the writer reveals, is not a matter of choice but of extreme necessity. However they begrudge the country, Ghana is a refuge, a sanctuary in which they find status and privileges they would never dream of in England. In Ghana they have power and esteem, but in England they would be assured only of nonentity. In a word, these expatriates are exiles in the country.

Laurence reveals this fact even more starkly through the proposal of Africanization in the Firm, which means men like Cunningham, Thayer and Kestoe are likely to be replaced with Africans. The expatriates react to this proposal as if it was a freak storm threatening to uproot everything they had grown in their exile. As they take in its implications with despair, we realize in each one of them a deep and desperate need for Africa.

For Cunningham -- carrying himself with the poise of a knight but hopelessly unqualified for any job -- Africa is where his career is certain to end. Going back to England would devastate him because, as his wife reveals, he cannot hope to get any job there:

... He can do a little of everything and not enough of anything. And even if he could get a job, he couldn't hold it. Do you know the last job he had in England? He was office manager for a tuppenny-ha'penny firm that manufactured glass eyes for teddy bears... And he was sacked -- yes, even from that. It was the only job he'd been able to find at home ...(123).

A graduate of Walhampton, Cunningham is a product of the English public school -- that controversial institution seen as fostering model English gentlemen, inculcating in them an intrinsic sense of superiority, without giving any real expertise. He carries himself like a perfect gentleman, never forgetting that "men like himself do not stumble or cavort: they bear themselves well under every circumstance" (10). But his poise only belies the fact that he has no qualifications for any job and is the most dispensable of all in the Firm. With Africanization ruffling his composure, we realize that he has only thrived in Ghana by putting up a false front of self-exaltation and racist pride. It is an indication of how hopeless he is that his only reaction to Africanization is to curse and drink himself out. And to save himself from the impending abyss of despair, he heads to Nigeria, where "It'll start all over again. And end the same way, too..." (238). In his hopelessness the writer shows a man desperately chained to Africa, although he refuses to feel beholden to the only place where he could find refuge.

Similarly for James Thayer, Africa is the last foothold in his precarious career ladder, and with the coming of independence he stands to lose it. Whereas he would likely have spent his life as a "mole-like ledge keeper" if he had stayed in England, in Africa he has attained a high position and cultivated power: "here he had walked on Mount Olympus. He had dispensed justice as he saw it -- rewards for the compliant ones, punishments for the unruly" (179). To him Africanization heralds the fall of a dynasty, and in desperation to hang on to his private empire at the Firm, he tries to defeat the impending changes. But upon realizing how futile this effort is, he can only face his abysmal future with tears. His plight is perhaps best articulated by his wife Cora: "What'll happen to us? Where will we go?" (129).

In these men and women, Laurence paints a portrait of people trapped in hopelessness and despair but who, rather than feel beholden to the country and people among whom they find refuge, hide behind facades of self-importance and racism. The image of these expatriates as colonials and imperialists is thus superseded by that of exiles. Laurence reveals that their imperial poise and their racist pride and chauvinism are only false fronts they maintain in order to conceal their vulnerability and hopelessness.

Although Laurence scorns these expatriates for their racist conceit and their disparaging view of Africa, their portraiture provokes more sympathy than hate. We see them not just as perpetrators but also as victims of the vicious process of colonialism. In colonizing Africa these Englishmen have also colonized themselves. They have trapped themselves in

their own deceit and illusions of superiority over Africans. Gorging themselves on their vanity, they have so exalted themselves that they have completely lost touch with reality. Hence they can only thrive in the delusive world of colonialism because in its illusions of racial superiority, it gives vitality to their drab lives. Their sense of disillusionment and despair as independence approaches is based on the threat to this world which the new set-up engenders. The writer both scorns and pities them, because in these abhorrent imperialists she also sees men and women distraught in their desperation to hold on to the only world they know. Cunningham's deflated figure, Thayer's tear-streaked face, the plaintive whining of Cora, "if we're sent home, what shall we do? What will become of us?" (124) -- all these paint a pitiable image, rather like beached sea-creatures gasping for life after the imperial sea has retreated.

Laurence's image of the English expatriates, however, is not a stock representation of unvaried gloom. In Miranda and Johnnie Kestoe, she represents two characters who have different attitudes and dispositions from the rest, and who thus tend to extenuate the negative image of the expatriates.

Alone among the expatriates we encounter in This Side Jordan, Miranda Kestoe has respect and genuine human feeling towards Africans. At the opening of the novel, when her husband's colleagues resent him for dancing with an African woman, Miranda points out that she finds it quite normal:

... Did you think I cared that you danced with an African girl? The only thing I minded was that you -- you thought there was something dirty about doing it. That's all (8).

Henceforth, Miranda's portrait is set as a liberal and anti-racist European, and completely at variance with the conservative colonials that we find in the other white women. She sees Africans as equal and worthy human beings who deserve respect and refuses to be drawn into the pettiness and dismissive contempt of the other 'memsahibs'. While the other English women disavow Africa and lock themselves up in their bungalow fortresses, Miranda is portrayed as always outgoing and well-meaning, even taking the initiative to relate congenially with Africans. She keeps a friendly contact with Nathaniel Amegbe through whom she hopes to learn about African customs and way of life.

Miranda is also aware of the fundamental differences between her world view and the Africans'. She has an impressive understanding of the problems facing the nation of Ghana, which she sees as both peculiar and typical of every society:

Corruption in high places, she said, was a social phenomenon that appeared in every culture. There was more excuse for it here, she said, because the first loyalty of an African was to his tribe and family. The nation, as a social unit, was new here, she said, and could not hope to command the same loyalty for at least another generation... (163).

Her awareness goes beyond the social matters because she has a fair sense of history as well. She is especially sensitive to the faux pas of colonialism and the disruptive influence of the Christian missions, the legacy of which Africans continue to suffer. "There aren't

many [African Artists] yet, are there?" she points out to Amegbe at an exhibition of African art . "Of course it's no wonder. The early missions must have done a great deal to wipe out indigenous art here. By forbidding image-making ..." (42).

Because of this consciousness of history, she feels an obligatory sense of guilt and sympathy towards Africans -- a burden which she sees as the inheritance of every white man because of the colonial role of their compatriots in Africa. To her the white man's burden is not the civilizing mission in Africa, but that "accumulated guilt" (54), and the onus to heal the historical wounds that Europeans inflicted on Africans.

Moreover, Miranda recognizes the inevitable strangeness between the African world and hers. For this reason she strives to learn as much as possible about African history and culture as a way of bridging the gap between the worlds. We encounter her not only at exhibitions of African art but also at the market place where she is trying to find out more about the native ways of life. This attests to her mettle as a human character who is interested in the lives of others.

However, her keenness to learn about Africa is also the bane of her character. Her image is marred by an overwhelming anthropological impulse -- an unattractive curiosity to find out about quaint aspects of African life -- which often breeches politeness and tends to embarrass others. For instance, in her fascination with odd and outmoded African

customs, she requests Amegbe to lead her through the market where her main interest is in the 'medicine stalls' which dispense rotten bones for juju.

In their quaintness, the heaps of rotten bones in this place may be attractive to her, but to Amegbe they are quite something else. They represent to him the painfully embarrassing reality of his heritage. These oddities -- "the crocodile head ... the bones grating against the husk of brittle skin ... the monkey head, dried and hairy, eyes closed, dead nostrils puckered with the stench of death ... and the patches of crocodile skin, leopard skin, snake skin, half scraped, stinking in the sun" (158) -- are the ugly unburied bones of Amegbe's dead culture which Miranda, in her prying curiosity, parades before him. They also relate to the painful childhood experience of his younger sister dying in the hands of a fetish priest, in front of his and his mother's anguished eyes. Miranda can never experience this pain with Amegbe's deep sense of involvement because to her these experiences are an external, scenic reality.

Miranda's eagerness to know about these antiquated customs provokes anguish and humiliation in Amegbe who is struggling to forget his repulsive past. His retort, "What does it matter to you? Let it be" (160), is therefore justified; and so is Laurence's caution in The Prophet's Camel Bell that "people are not oyster shells, to be pride at" (51). In her meddlesome prying which is steeped in naivety, together with her exaggerated politeness and anxiety to please, she is the quintessence of the European just - come - to - Africa.

More than this, Miranda clearly comes through as a portrait of the white liberal in Africa. She flaunts her kindness and politeness towards everybody, and quickly disapproves of such spurious racism as she sees in her white colleagues. She also recognizes the humanity of Africans, and although sometimes unwittingly intruding into their private world, she respects all the people for what they are. Refuting the stock condemnation of Africans as corrupt and inefficient, Miranda shows confidence in their ability to replace the Europeans in the Firm if training is patiently extended to them. Her sense of involvement in the transition taking place in the country is seen in her efforts to help identify African school-leavers who can take over from Europeans in the Firm. She is quite unlike her colleagues who fail to understand that change is inevitable, and the more supportive of it the Europeans in Ghana are the better for them. On the whole Miranda shows more sobriety and humanism than any of the other white characters in the novel.

Because of her liberalism and clear understanding of the changes taking place in Ghana, Miranda is able to exercise a progressive influence on her husband, Kestoe. She urges him to change his negative attitude towards working with Africans, and by so doing, helps him to escape the axe of Africanization in the Firm.

Johnnie Kestoe is the most important of the white characters in the novel, being the one through whom the consciousness of the others is revealed. Moving between them and meeting them in their houses, offices or at the club, he is able to bring out their views

towards various issues, most importantly about Africanization and the impending independence. Rather than meet these characters on their own, we meet them when they meet Kestoe or when he is thinking about their predicament. However, his centrality in the novel does not lie here alone, but also in his role as the only one among the British expatriates in This Side Jordan who is capable of adjusting to the changing circumstances in Ghana.

Mainly because of his family background, Kestoe is different from his colleagues in the Firm in a number of respects, although he shares their hatred for Africans. Raised in the beggary of Kilburn, London, he has haunting memories of the squalor of his childhood:

Kilburn, London, N. W. The room was dark in day, cold as a corpse. The easing stairs wound up and up and up, tiring the legs off you, and the bits of untacked lino were traps to trip the unwary. He remembered how scared he always was of running into that nameless man-tenant who used to finger him, cursing sweetly into his ear all the while with breath that stank of sugared violets. The hallways smelled of boiled Swedes and shop-fried fish and the harsh soap that was the women's last defiance against chaos. The room was up so close to the top of the building that you knew the choking winter fog would still be with you after it had lifted from the street (57-58).

In addition to this, he also carries the trauma and shame of his parents: his mother screaming, cursing, praying and finally dying from the contorting pains of an attempted abortion in front of his child's eyes, and the hopelessness of his father whom he remembers as:

A slow-witted Irishman, a half man with a bone disease, a limping clown who went by the name Dennis Kestoe and who earned his two quid a week slopping out the men's lavatories in the tube stations with bucket and rag ... (4-5)

To this "gutterstreet of his childhood" (4) also belongs bitter memories of his community's relentless competition for meager survival against despised but more able-bodied black immigrants from Jamaica.

Coming from a background of such extreme privation, Kestoe has grown up with a lingering sense of insecurity which has patterned his attitudes to life. This background also defines his difference with his expatriate colleagues in the Firm. While Cunningham and Thayer -- who hail from more elevated ranks of society, and who are convinced of their superior status -- remain impervious to ideas because they feel invincible and inviolable, Kestoe is dogged by his sense of vulnerability. "I was damn lucky to get this job, and I don't want to risk it now," (54) he reminds his wife. While his colleagues indulge in vanity and self-exaltation, Kestoe is pre-occupied with his own survival.

It is also his background that has shaped his attitude towards Africans. We are informed right from the opening of the novel that Kestoe does not like Africans, and looking into his childhood we can see why:

In that gutter street of his childhood there had co-existed, but not peacefully, some Jamaicans. Children learned young there. Stick, stone, shod foot in belly, knee in crotch, and -- when you had filched enough from shop or barrow to earn one -- knife. The

street children's creed, more powerful and obeyed than that of the Apostles, did not admit the brotherhood even of siblings, but even in anarchy there must be some order. All despised all, but some were despised more than others. Those London Irish were low in the social scale, but lower still were the Jamaicans, black, heathens. They lived cheaper than anyone else could, a dozen to a room, big-muscled men with a crazy fear of being deported... (4).

His resentment of blacks has origins in this cut-throat world of his childhood in which their contact was marked by unrelenting strife and violence when meager survival was at stake.

When his emaciated father lost his job to a Jamaican, Kestoe, then only ten years old, wielded a knife against the Jamaican's son:

The buttocks of the Jamaican's son bled profusely like life turned to mere meat, and the nigger, who was thirteen and a head taller, bawled like a raped nun, each huge tremulous tear setting off an orgasm of laughter in the bitter Irish bellies of young bystanders... (5).

When he was caught at it by the Jamaican father, Kestoe paid with his blood:

In a fury of paternal tenderness, the Jamaican had hit with a clenched fist, and when the white boy had finished spitting blood into the gutter, the black man had picked him up and he could feel the big dark body trembling. He had spat again, in loathing, and the black father dropped him abruptly onto the cobblestones... (5).

Kestoes has thus come to fix blacks with a threat to his survival. In Accra, he finds himself in yet another gutter street of his life in which his position is again encroached upon by black people. Reminded of his insecurity as he once again faces Africans here, he

is overtaken by his childhood hatred. All he wants is to hurt or humiliate. "If I could only see that bastard Amegbe in jail ... I can't think of anything at this point that would make me more happy" (217), he tells his wife, as Amegbe's indiscretions jeopardize his private Africanization programme by which he hopes to impress his bosses and keep his position in the Firm. Whether it is Amegbe or Victor Edusei, Africans relive in him images of that manacing Jamaican assailant of his boyhood at whom he could only hiss, "bastard, bastard, black black bastard--" (4).

Laurence gives us these details of Kestoe's background to enable us to understand his attitude towards Africans. We learn that his resenting them is more of an instinct embedded in his consciousness through experience than a racist poise. The fact that he does not claim any racial prerogatives like Cunningham or Thayer indicates that he is struggling against a feeling of inferiority rather than of superiority. It is because of this understanding that we are able to sympathise with him, his hatred for Africans notwithstanding.

Kestoe's desperation for survival in the face of his vulnerability can also be seen in his treacherous treatment of the other expatriates in the Firm. Aware that he can save his job if he admitted to change, he quickly decides to pitch with Cameron Shepherd, the proponent of the Africanization process. In doing this he goes out of his way to betray Cunningham and Thayer by revealing that they have been blocking change in the Firm. Only this way can his job be saved.

It is significant that when he sees an opportunity for saving himself he becomes more amenable to Miranda's support for Africanization, because in this change there is not only promise for his survival but also a chance for advancement. His flexibility saves him from the terminal fate of Cunningham and Thayer, and there is hope for him in the future.

It is true that Kestoe's change of attitude towards Africans is induced mainly by his need to save himself from the broom of Africanization, yet we can also note a more fundamental transformation in him as he experiences Africa. Through a series of three sexual encounters with African women, we see his humanism wearing down the barriers of racial restriction to express itself freely. Ultimately, as he closes the gap between himself and an African woman, he is able to shed his stranger's callousness and to empathize with fellow humanity regardless of their racial dividedness.

His first encounter is with Charity Donkor at the dance club "Weekend in Wyoming", the scene on which the novel opens. Kestoe has only just come to Africa and in addition to his own resentment at Africans, there is a precept among his expatriate colleagues which disapproves contact between white men and African women. Although he goes against the grain to dance with Charity, we note that their contact is also marked by their separateness. Dancing with the African girl slightly arouses Kestoe's sensuality, but he also remains conscious of his scorn for her and of his colleagues' eyes of angry disapproval. His sense of humiliation after this dance, his self-reproach and self-

deprecating apologies to his colleagues and his wife, all acknowledge his separateness with the African girl.

What divides Kestoe and Charity is the prevailing social order in their divided community in which any contact between an African woman and a white man is frowned at. In their pretensions to decency and self-preservation, the English expatriates feel that they have to keep a certain detachment from Africans. As Cunningham self-righteously puts it, "A chap is seen with an African woman and soon his own servants or clerks get cheeky -- won't work -- laugh behind his back ..." (6).

Kestoe's second encounter is with the girl-wife of his African cook, when she slips into his garage. Finding himself alone with this girl, his sensuality is again aroused, and he moves to shake down the barrier between them: "Moved by some inner compulsion he dared not consciously consider, Johnnie stepped closer to her. She stiffened but did not move ... Johnnie reached out one of his hands, and touched her breast" (134). But he is again restricted by his prejudice and he disentangles from the girl, humiliated by the realization that "she was a bush-girl, and he a white man, was of a species so strange to her that she could not see him as a man at all" (135). Realizing that his sensuality cannot have its way, he reacts with puerile anger, irrationally lashing at the girl. His frustration finds outlet and futile satisfaction in this violence.

In his third and appropriately the most significant of his encounters, Kestoe meets an African girl who has only just been recruited into prostitution. Inexperienced and uncertain of her surroundings, this girl is only a pawn in a pimp's cunning scheme. Lamprey the pimp has arranged to offer the woman to Kestoe in order to stop him from turning over Amegbe to the police. While this trade-off offers Amegbe respite from his fear of being arrested, to Kestoe it gives something he has wanted for a long time -- an African woman.

The sexual episode between Kestoe and the African woman is imagistic and full of symbolism. The squalid room in which they lodge is deliberately depicted to represent a miniature Ghana -- the social make-up of the country is mirrored here by a bible and an ablution basin which represent the nation's Christians and Muslims, while a framed portrait of Kwame Nkrumah with the caption "Freedom" portrays the political spirit prevailing in the country. In this miniature Ghana, then, the stage is set for a symbolic encounter between an African woman and a white man.

In the twentieth century European discourse on Africa, the continent has been characterised as a woman, irresistible in her lure, ensnaring in her ravishing beauty, and often enticing white men to self-destruction. As Hammond and Jablow note in The Myth of Africa, "English idiom readily suggests parallels between acts of conquest and of sex, between the conquered country and the raped woman" (148). It is on this metaphor that

Laurence plays when she depicts this African woman being sexually brutalised by a white man, as European invading armies did Africa.

Seen in this light then, both Kestoe and this woman compound two possibilities: they are not only human individuals but also symbols that personify the historical contact between Africa and Europe. As an individual, the woman is impoverished, and as a result she is exploited, abused and hurt. As a symbol she personifies a country that has been invaded, conquered and abused. Kestoe, in the viciousness and callousness with which he makes love to the woman -- tearing off her clothes and opening her circumcision wound in the process -- represents the cruelty and savagery of an invading force.

From this incident, it is possible to see Kestoe as a sexual pervert, a man dominated by raw sensuality and depraved in his lust for an African woman. In fact, Micere Githae - Mugo seems to yield to this notion when she evaluates Edusei's opinion of the white man in Visions of Africa:

... Victor's low opinion of Johnnie is proven right when we see him attempt to seduce Whiskey's 'small wife'... and then slap her when she recoils from his advances. Even worse is the incident in which she makes love to an African initiate into 'the trade' and does it so animalistically that he opens up the girl's circumcision wound... (141 - 142).

It is indeed true that Kestoe's attitude to all these African women is revolting, but in order to be fair to him, we need to remember his background. Through his under-privileged

upbringing he has grown up to look at all black people not only as lower beings to be despised but also as antagonists to be hated and hurt at every opportunity. Indeed, in these women he seeks to satiate not just his sexual lust but also his inner desire to hurt. But something remarkable also happens to him through contact with the women. His attraction to them is in a way a recognition of their humanity, a recognition which he finds too stunning and difficult to accept, and therefore recoils from with violence. His violence is an attempt to disavow this recognition, but in the end he breaks down and lets his human kindness free.

When we look more closely at this last encounter, we note that Kestoe is overcome by a sea-saw of feelings. He is overtaken at once by a vague sense of concern and indifference towards the girl: "He wondered what her experience had been and where she had come from", but, "No. None of that was his concern. She was an African whore. That was all he needed to know about her, all he wanted to know" (229). This sea-saw of feelings betrays a crisis of conscience. In it we recognise a humanism struggling to the surface but simultaneously being depressed by racial prejudice and contempt.

Through his violence towards the girl, Kestoe tries to express this contempt, but ironically, he defeats it in the process. After the assault he looks at her not with spite or malice, but with sympathy and remorse, as he begins to recognise and accept her humanity for the first time:

He knew nothing about her, but she no longer seemed anonymous to him. He noticed for the first time that her face was fine boned, her hands slender and smooth as though they had not been coarsened by too much heavy work. Had she been sold by her family, or stolen, or had she elected to come here?... (233).

For the first time also he not only recognizes her misfortune and suffering, but he is also able to see her not as an African but as a woman, a human being:

But it did not really matter who she specifically was. She was herself and no other. She was someone, a woman who belonged somewhere and who for some reason not of her own had been forced to seek him here in this evil-smelling room, and through him, indignity and pain (233).

Kestoe's transformation is complete. He is able to understand human pain and suffering, and to empathise with another human being regardless of the fact that she is an African.

Because of this transformation and his willingness to change his attitude towards Africans, Kestoe is saved from the dismal fate of his colleagues in the Firm. Together with Miranda, they are facets that redeem Laurence's image of the white expatriates in This Side Jordan. Laurence is aware that human beings are always different from each other, is careful not to generalise in her depiction of these expatriates, and therefore portrays them as human individuals rather than as race categories. In these two individuals therefore, there is hope for a brighter future as the others who are not amenable to change face frustration, disillusionment, and despair.

In summing up the images of Africa that Laurence captures in This Side Jordan, we note that despite all the gloom and despair that faces some of the characters, in the end, a spirit of optimism prevails. The coming of independence to Ghana and the concomitant Africanization in the Firm are enormously hopeful developments for the country even though the immediate results are uncertain. In the writer's view there is hope for social renewal and emergence of a new, more balanced and stable social order in the country. In her protagonists we see signs of regeneration, not only for themselves but for their society as well. Their human foibles and doubts notwithstanding, they have hopes for survival and a new life.

Laurence's optimism for the society she depicts is most appropriately summed up in the title of the novel, This Side Jordan. The title is derived from the biblical book of Joshua, part of which the writer quotes in the frontispiece of the novel:

Until the Lord have given your brethren rest, as he hath given you, and they have also possessed the land which the Lord your God giveth them; then ye shall return unto the land of your possession, and enjoy it, which Moses the Lord's servant gave you on this side Jordan towards the sunrising (Joshua 1:15).

In the biblical story from which this passage is extracted, God had bequeathed to the people of Israel a land of plenty in Canaan, in which he had promised them freedom from oppression and want. To reach this land, however, they had to be led by Joshua -- a man of great courage and vision -- across the River Jordan to the east of which lay the

promised land. The undertaking carried a great hope and promise for the nation of Israel, but it also required great endurance and faith.

Laurence signifies this biblical promise by giving her novel the symbolic title This Side Jordan. She envisages a similar hope for realization of a new life for the nation and people of Ghana as they look forward to the imminent independence, and for her protagonists who are struggling for personal liberties against the retrogressive influence of their past. She sees all of them as looking forward to a new life and brighter future, as did the people of Israel to the promised land “on this Side Jordan toward the sunrising.”

For Nathaniel Amegbe -- portrait of Ghana's independence generation struggling against the lure of their old homes in the village -- there is new hope. He has decided, although with great remorse and hesitance, that he must stay on in his present place and life and make good of them. Rather than yield to the beckon of the old village and dismal life, he will live in Accra, the cosmopolitan home in which he straddles two different worlds and has the opportunity to choose from two different traditions.

Amegbe sees himself as having a new chance, and living “in a new land with a new name” (274). With such renewed faith and confidence in himself, he is determined that he can do something at least, both for himself and for others. Although he has not accomplished anything tangible as yet, his decision to stay on as a teacher at Futura Academy is positive and determined. He wavers no more, and this signifies a new certitude in himself. He

affirms to himself: "A man must belong somewhere. If it is right or if it is not right, I must stay. The new roots may not grow straight, but they have grown too strong to be cut away ..." (274). From such words, we become aware of a renewed Amegbe, a man who is in control of himself and who, knowing that his destiny rests in his own hands, is ready to dispense with it as he will. He has no fear any more as he declares with firmness and finality: "My God is the God of my own soul and my own speech is my mouth, and my home is here, here, here, my home is here at last" (275). This declaration mirrors the triumph of an individual who, at last, has broken from the manacles of tradition.

For Johnnie Kestoe too, the fortunes are changing. Not only does he overcome his prejudice -- the impediment that has separated him from blacks since his childhood -- he also gains from new tidings in the Firm. He is initially apprehensive of Africanization but the programme turns out to be just the opportunity for him to ascend in the Firm. As dead woods like Cunningham and Thayer are replaced, Kestoe will be promoted to become Assistant Manager, with prospects of becoming full manager within a year. It is also significant that his right hand man in the Firm will be none other than the brash Victor Edusei, who is a symbol of Ghana's radical hope.

In his ascendance in the Firm Edusei signifies the hope for Ghanaians taking firmer control of their country, and consequently ending the domination of Africans by Europeans.

Neither over-intellectualizing the task of their new nation nor throwing up his hands in despair, he represents a force that is potent enough to regenerate his country and set it on

a course of prosperity. More than this, the fact that Edusei and Kestoe agree to work hand in hand to implement the Africanization programme signifies the dawn of more affable race relations in the country. There is hope for racial integration.

There is hope also for Futura Academy, Jacob Abraham Mensah's decrepit school. Its only committed teacher will not abandon it after all but will on as Futura's "guide in a new land, its ferryman across Jordan" (273). There is then hope for revival in this institution.

This optimism is underscored at the end of the novel by the simultaneous birth of babies to both the Kestoes and the Amegbes. The birth of these babies symbolizes the crossing of a threshold in the lives of the protagonists. It signifies also the birth of a new generation who will possess the new nation of Ghana. Kestoe's baby girl is named Mary after his departed mother, whom he had always been ashamed and anguished to think of. In naming the baby after her, Kestoe implies that he has accepted his past, and in the baby he finds and expresses expiation for all the shame and anguish he has suffered.

Amegbe's baby boy, on the other hand, is named Joshua, the courageous man in the bible who led the people of Israel across River Jordan. Born in a city hospital rather than in the village, thus fulfilling his father's stubborn wish to be a city man, this baby symbolizes the hope that the people of Ghana will cross Jordan and possess the promised land.

It should be noted, however, that Laurence's emphasis is on potential rather than accomplished achievement. There is potential for Ghana's society to transform and emerge onto a new era of independence and progress. But this transformation can only be realised if Ghanaians rise up to take the challenge of making a new society. It is only their sincere efforts, their faith in themselves, trust and respect in each other which can develop this potential into reality. All Ghanaians must realise that the prosperity of this new land lies not in vainglorious pride in their separate pasts, but in their unity and integration, regardless of race or ethnic backgrounds. They must recognise their common potential and interdependence if they hope to achieve anything.

Hence, Jacob Abraham Mensah must no longer see Amegbe as a helpless man whom he can exploit for his own monetary benefit, nor Amegbe see him as a man he should fear and hate. Likewise, Kestoe must not see Africans in the Firm as a threat to his job whom he should keep at bay. Rather, they should all see each other as partners in a new team for their nation, for only in this partnership lies their nation's potential for true independence and nationhood.

In This Side Jordan therefore, Laurence gives us a valuable insight into the Ghanaian society of the period immediately before independence. Through the memorable images of this period which she captures in the novel, she illuminates the social problems and dilemmas facing Ghana's independence society. In these images she conveys not only an

invaluable understanding of this important period, but also her optimism for the future of the society in spite of the predicament facing it.

CHAPTER FOUR

IMAGES OF CHANGE AND SURVIVAL IN THE TOMORROW-TAMER

The Tomorrow-Tamer is a collection of ten short stories set in Ghana, West Africa, in the period of that country's independence. Most of the stories in this collection deal with the process of change that occurs at the personal and communal levels, and how it affects the people it touches. Margaret Laurence gives us her perspective on contemporary African society by focusing on the moral and spiritual dilemmas of various characters as they try to apprehend the changing conditions.

Social change is the dominant aesthetic imperative that pervades these stories. The coming of independence to Ghana provides background to no less than five of the ten stories, and the imminence of political change is therefore an important force that patterns the lives of the characters depicted in the stories. Many of the protagonists are caught at turning points in their lives, hence we see them as they try to make choices and adjustments in response to their changing milieu.

These changing conditions provide an ample influence and background against which we see the individuals and communities as they try to make adjustments. Change has the potential to either improve or mar the lives of the protagonists. As many of them discover,

the process of change has both a negative and a positive potential, depending on how they react to it.

In The Tomorrow - Tamer, the process of change also generates the conflicts that move the stories forward. The coming of independence in “A Gourdful of Glory”, or the departure of white expatriates as independence approaches in “The Perfume Sea”, are the type of events which usher in new circumstances. They affect the lives of the protagonists and make them set some course of action. The changes therefore provide narrative tension, thus creating and maintaining our interest in the stories by accentuating the lives of the protagonists. In the title story “The Tomorrow-Tamer”, the arrival of alien men and machines to construct a bridge at Owurasu punctures the accustomed rhythm of life in this isolated village. This sets the stage for conflict between the villagers who favour change and those who do not.

The effect of changing times and fortunes is the cause of anxiety and uncertainty to many of the protagonists. To some -- like Kofi in “The Tomorrow-Tamer”, or Ruth Quansah in “The Rain Child” -- the changes bring social dividends and alienation in their lives. Others are compelled to chart out new paths, like Mr. Archipelago and Doree do in “The Perfume Sea”. Yet, others react with violence, like Adamo in “The Voices of Adamo”, who lashes out viciously and kills another person because the very prospect of change threatens his existence.

Even to whole communities the process of change entails serious social and spiritual dilemmas. To the village of Owurasu in “The Tomorrow-Tamer”, the construction of a modern bridge in the vicinity of their shrine impinges unfavourably on the life of the entire community. The villagers must not only learn to live with strangers in their midst but also suffer the desecration of their communal shrine.

In the face of all these changes and uncertainties, survival against adversity becomes imperative. However, survival to Laurence’s protagonists is not just the ability to cope or thrive against adversity. It is also the capacity to change with the circumstances, to adapt, and to eventually emerge stronger whether because or in spite of the changes.

Across the mirror of change that these stories create, Laurence reflects various images of survival as individuals and communities struggle to grasp the changing milieu. Perhaps the most stunning of these images is that of Godman Pira, the hero in “Godman’s Master”. After he is unexpectedly freed from a box where he has been detained for a long time, the dwarf-man hardly knows how to make a living in the unaccustomed, unfamiliar world of full-sized men. However, when his attempt to cling onto his saviour is thwarted, Godman is forced to strike out alone to face his fate. When we meet him again at the end of the story he has a stunning story of his survival feats to tell.

Lucky for me I am alive at all ... I ate cat, and slept cold, and trapped cutting-grass and shrivelled in the sun like a seed. And I drank palm wine with a blind beggar, and pimped for a painted girl, and sang like a bird with a mission band for the white man’s god.

And I rode a blue mammy-lorry with a laughing driver who feared the night voices, and I walked the forest with a leper who taught me to speak pidgin, and I caught a parrot and tamed it and put in its mouth the words “money sweet” and we begged together until I tired of it and sold it to an old woman who had no daughters ... (158-9).

Finally, however, it is with new-found pride and confidence that he proclaims: “I have known the worst and the worst and the worst ... and yet I live. I fear and fear, and yet I live” (159).

As we look back at other protagonists caught in that similar or different circumstances, we realise that Godman’s words are the enduring paradigm that defines each one of them. However difficult life may be, the ultimate triumph is to be able to say, like Godman, “yet I live”. This is survival, and the ultimate victory is life.

The Tomorrow-Tamer then is a celebration of the struggle by the people of Ghana to adapt and cope in the face of adversity. In these stories we find Laurence’s subtle expression of her optimism and faith in the ability of the African people to overcome these adversities. In the various protagonists, she celebrates the courage and ingenuity of the African people to survive in the changing milieu.

However, Laurence’s interest is not in the Africans alone. A number of the short-stories deal with the image of the white expatriates who are also affected by the changes taking place in Africa. Like their African counterparts, they have to make adjustments in their

attitudes and lives in order to cope. However, some of the white men like Philip Hardacre in “The Pure Diamond Man” or Brother Lemon in “The Merchant of Heaven” are satirized for their antiquated attitudes towards life in Africa. Lawrence has neither patience nor respect for the conceited white man who approaches Africa as a museum for antique customs, or who sees Africans as savage pagans begging the mercy of the white man’s god.

The Tomorrow-Tamer consists of finely accomplished and compelling short-stories, each of which is ingeniously knit with well developed dialogue and fully realized narrative. They also impress us with their well drawn, sustained and fully rounded characters who convince us of their humanity. Each of the stories entertainingly and imaginatively illustrates the writer’s perception of life in Africa.

Laurence creates her stories from the material of every day life, and this gives them a peculiar appeal that is at once popular and literary. Her gift of portrayal enables her to make delicate descriptions of setting and character.

At this juncture, it is important to examine some of the formal elements which make The Tomorrow-Tamer such a vivid evocation of life in Ghana.

Setting is one of the most finely accomplished elements in The Tomorrow-Tamer.

Although details of setting come out more clearly in some of the stories than in others,

Laurence evokes localities, scenes and moods quite accurately and vividly. Even where the setting is generalised as in “The Voices of Adamo”, specific scenes are always described in considerable detail. The colour and mood of local life is powerfully evoked and the spirit of the local people is captured in great detail. The descriptions of setting take in not only the atmosphere of the environment but also the zest and bustle of the African people, the gaudy colours of the mammy cloth worn by market women, the epigrammatic names of the mammy lorries they ride in, the palm oil and frying plantain smell of the market place, and the suffocatingly humid conditions of the tropical atmosphere. All these give a complete impression which helps to root the characters in specific milieu.

The linkages between these details of setting and the central concerns of each story will be discussed later. However, there are two observations worth making here. First, these imagistic evocations of atmosphere give the stories a firm sense of place. Every character and incident is rooted in specific milieu, and this contributes to the overall verisimilitude and realism of the stories.

Secondly, these very detailed descriptions are evidence that Laurence was aware that her immediate readers would be people who are not familiar with Africa. Nine of the stories were first published in various periodicals in Canada. Therefore Laurence’s immediate readers were Canadian, although the stories themselves have a universal appeal. Hence these detailed descriptions also serve a documentary purpose in that they familiarise the

readers with the conditions of each specific locality and with all aspects of the people's way of life.

Looking at the stories in relation to their settings, we note that Laurence begins each one of them with the evocation of place and atmosphere. Characters and incident then emerge on to the scene after our imagination has already been captured by the place and atmosphere. The opening of "The Perfume Sea" best demonstrates this:

Outside, the small town was growing sluggish under the sedative sun of late morning. The one-footed beggar who squatted beside Mr. Archipelago's door had gone to sleep on the splintery wooden steps. Past the turquoise - and - red facade of Cowasjee's Silk Bazaar, in the rancid and shadowy room, the shrivelled Parsee sat, only half awake ... At the K. Tachie (General Merchant), Tachie himself sat beside his cash register, surrounded by boxes and barrels ... Pariah dogs on the road snared over a cat corpse; then, panting, tongues dribbling, defeated by the sun, they crawled back to a shadow corner, where their scabrous hides were fondled by an old man in a hashish dream ... (20-21).

Here the atmosphere of the outdoor surrounding in the small town where the story is set is so powerfully evoked that we can imaginatively transport ourselves there. Mr.

Archipelago and Doree, the main characters in the story, only emerge on the scene later.

In describing this setting, Laurence seizes upon small particulars -- like "splintery wooden steps" or "boxes and barrels" -- which when gathered together form a deep composite effect. They leave a very vivid impression of the scene where the story happens.

Some of the stories, notably “The Tomorrow-Tamer” and “The Voices of Adamo”, are set in remote countryside localities which have hardly been touched by external influence. These tranquil backgrounds are appropriate for the unsophisticated and conservative mentalities of the communities depicted. More than this, these settings enhance our grasp of African communal life and enable us to appreciate the impact of the external influence on the social set up. This influence is mainly disruptive, as we see in “the Tomorrow-Tamer” when the construction of a bridge at the village shrine takes the people of Owurasu by storm. The arrival of alien men and machines ruffles the quietude of Owurasu not only with the noise of the heavy machines and the dust blown by the trucks, but also with the spell-binding desecration of the shrine of the village god. In this story it is also interesting to observe how the gradual emergence of the awesome bridge on the village’s mundane landscape coincides with the disappearance of Owura’s grove, hence signifying one god supplanting another in the village’s changing cosmic universe.

In “The Rain Child” setting both shapes and reflects the predicament of the main character. Ruth Quansah , a sixteen years old girl who has hitherto lived in England is brought to school at Eburaso Girls’ School. At school, she is surrounded by a vibrant community of African girls whom she cannot relate to. She finds herself separated from the rest of the girls by a vast cultural gap between her English upbringing and her new African surrounding . Her sense of alienation is accelerated by the presence of the Mackies, a white family, in the neighbourhood of the school. There is tension between the

African world inhabited by the other girls in school and the exotic world of David Mackie, an English boy who gives Ruth company after the school hours.

Hence, this setting with its two social poles heightens Ruth's emotional tension and alienation. It also reflects her predicament as a child torn between two discordant worlds. The English world of her childhood in England is now past, and the only vestiges of it that she finds in David Mackie do not quite recognise her as one who belongs here. Her most painful moment in the story is when David abashedly tells her, "I know you are not the ordinary kind of African. You're almost -- almost like a -- like us" (129). Clearly, there is no recognition here for Ruth, yet she herself does not recognise herself as belonging to the African world of Kwaale and the other girls in school. This tension breaks Ruth down, and in flight from both the African girls in school and David Mackie, she finds nowhere else to go except into the arms of a rather backward migrant boy who works in the school. And perhaps this is where she belongs, in Yindo's hut, in the house of the socially dislocated.

In "The Voices of Adamo", it is also the setting which, above everything else, reflects Adamo's predicament as a displaced child. The story opens in a generalised setting in an unnamed village which is nonetheless vividly described. Laurence paints a powerful image of a well knit and balanced village community living in mutual harmony with its surrounding.

In this set up, Adamo's mother represents family unity, care and warmth, while his father provides security through his strength and maintaining spiritual links with their departed ancestors.

However, this harmony and security is suddenly shattered when the community is hit by a smallpox epidemic. Adamo is subsequently spurned out of the family and thrown out into the hostile wilderness. He must take refuge elsewhere to avoid the epidemic which decimates the rest of the community. As he journeys through hostile forests, we realise that this boy who had always known family warmth and security is now all alone, without family or relation in a vast and unrelenting world. The hostility of the landscape he journeys through is captured here:

The thorn bushes and liana vines by day were green nets that could snare only an unwatchful traveller, but at night they changed, became formless and yet solid, a heaviness of dark before the eyes. Anything a pace away seemed non-existent, as though the world stopped where the foot fell. Adamo had no light .. He stumbled over tree roots, slipped on the decay of last year's growth, grasped at branches and found his hands held ferns, insubstantial as spider webs ... (208).

Not only this desolate and oppressive landscape, but also the atmosphere in the scene after he has been dismissed from the army band impresses on us that Adamo is a desperately vulnerable child in a world where both man and animals live in tribes, families and clans:

He walked back to the barracks, and it was almost night. Tribes of white egrets were flying back to the baobab trees where they slept. Through the clash and clatter of the city's cars and voices, the

families of frogs in the nearby lagoon could be heard beginning the throaty trilling that would go on until morning. The thin screeching of the cicada clan came from the “niim” branches now stirring with the first breeze of evening. The bandsmen had left the barracks for dinner. Adamo entered quietly and sat down on the cot.

The background that Laurence creates through this depiction of “tribes of white egrets”, “families of frogs” and “cicada clan” create a palpable atmosphere of harmony and community. But this atmosphere also foregrounds Adamo’s desolation and vulnerability. In all this set up, he is the only one who has no family or relation to give him company. We can therefore see that Lawrence ingeniously uses elements of setting such as background and atmosphere to accentuate the predicament of the protagonist in this story.

In some of the other stories a similar effect is achieved by making the setting dynamic rather than static. The protagonists strike out from their initial surrounding, and in doing so not only enhance their fortunes and inner lives, but also deepen our insights.

One such story is “The Pure Diamond Man” where there is both a temporal and physical shift in the setting. The story moves us from the present to the past as Tetteh recalls his encounter with Philip Hardacre, the conceited English visitor who yearns to see the primitive African life he had read about in anthropology text books. The place of action also shifts from the city to the small village of Gyakrom where Tetteh takes Hardacre ostensibly to show him that primeval Africa he yearns for. Hardacre’s journey from the city to Gyakrom becomes a journey of deceit, frustration and disillusionment. He discovers not Africa’s but his own backwardness and folly.

In “ The Drummer of All the World”, the narrative time and time is telescoped back and forth by the autobiographical narrator. Matthew, the son of an English missionary reminisces on his childhood in a small African village, where he was surrounded by the warmth of his friend Kwabena, the love of his nurse Yaa, and the romance of the adventurous African world. He also shifts the perspective to recall the changes he encounters later upon coming back to Africa after ten years’ absence.

On coming back, Matthew discovers with pain and pique that the African world he once knew and cherished is vastly changed. His consciousness, as well as that of his friend Kwabena, has also changed. The shift in time and surrounding enables him to look back at the African people he knew in his childhood with new honesty and insight. He can now see their pain and frustration which had escaped his perception in his childhood. With his new insight, he can now share in the pain and frustration of his African friend Kwabena. At the same time he can accept his inevitable separateness from this pain.

The stories in The Tomorrow-Tamer are developed through ingeniously plotted incidents which lead to a culminating point and then graduate in to denouement. The culminating point is often a decisive event which alters the life of the protagonists. We see the protagonists moving from one point of life to another through natural transitions and progressions of time. There are no hidden causes or ambiguities affecting the lives of the characters, and everything they do is explicable through their experiences and intentions.

These simply connected plots enhance Laurence's realistic portrayal of the characters. However, because the writer cannot linger to reproduce the full lapse of time in the short-stories, we also encounter a great deal of telescoping in The Tomorrow-Tamer. Laurence often presents us with single significant phases of action which are deliberately framed to epitomise the lives of the protagonists. The best examples here are in "The Drummer of All the World" when Matthew accidentally meets his childhood friend Kwabena on the street in Accra after more than ten years, or in "Godman's Master" when Moses Adu meets Godman Pira again after more than one year. We do not witness all the phases of the characters' lives, but we can connect what has happened to them within these lapses of time. The result is that we have compressed narratives which, nevertheless, are comprehensive enough to maintain an impression of continuing life.

In between these phases, we also encounter the little incidentals that characterise ordinary daily life, such as Ruth Quansah lumbering along the school path with a bucketful of water in "The Rain Child", or Kofi squatting beside the mortar where his sister is pounding grain in "The Tomorrow-Tamer". Episodes like these contribute to the total realism in the stories as they maintain a sense continuing ordinariness.

Some of these stories are realised through single momentous events which influence the lives of the protagonists. Such events are like the construction of a modern bridge at Owurasu in "the Tomorrow-Tamer", the coming of independence to Ghana in "A

Gourdful of Glory”, or the incidence of an epidemic in “The Voices of Adamo”. As these occurrences are anticipated or come to pass, they influence the lives of the individuals and communities who are forced to adjust to the changes taking place in their surroundings.

However, despite this, meaning is not epitomised in these single momentous events. We are offered a number of other little incidents in the stories which also carry their own significance and insights. Therefore attention to plot is not paramount in The Tomorrow-Tamer because meaning in each story is spread evenly throughout the texture.

“The Voices of Adamo” adequately exemplifies this point. The culminating crisis in the protagonist’s life comes when he faces expulsion from the army barracks which he has come to adopt as his new family. However, we do not have to wait until this climax to perceive the importance of family to a young boy who has grown up in a tightly knit community. Adamo’s anguish when he comes back to his old home to find his clan decimated, his blistering strain as he struggles in vain to find the remnants of his people, and his emotional rapture as he is finally adopted into a new family in the army -- all these in their own ways convey his dire need for a social cell in which to belong. This meaning is diffused throughout the fabric of the story, hence we not have to look out for the climax of the plot to unravel the significance of the story.

The narrative techniques employed in The Tomorrow-Tamer are quite simple and unpretentious. Six of the stories use the third person perspective where an omniscient

narrator commands absolute knowledge of all the characters and events. Three stories employ the I-narrator technique, and one story, “The Pure Diamond Man”, is told through an innovative combination of the first and third person narrators. In all these stories Laurence combines dialogue and authorial narration quite effectively. While dialogue is employed to expand and deepen narrative, authorial narration is used to give retrospective summaries and compress information. The result of this combination is a dynamic narrative style of great variety which makes the stories both enjoyable and impactful.

Three important aspects of Laurence’s narrative technique in The Tomorrow-Tamer call for a closer examination. These are the use of I-narrators who are also primary characters in “The Drummer of All the World” and “The Rain Child”, the combination of several points-of-view in “the Pure Diamond Man”, and the use of dialogue in all the stories as a complement of narrative and characterisation.

In “The Rain Child”, the story of Ruth Quansah, the “rain child”, is told through her teacher Miss Violet Nedden. Miss Nedden is an English woman who has been teaching at Eburaso Girls’ School for twenty-two years. Therefore she has good exposure to both African and English life, the two discordant worlds between which Ruth is torn. She is best suited as a narrator to picture for us the dilemma and tension that Ruth undergoes as she fruitlessly tries to reach out to both worlds.

However, Miss Nedden is not just a narrator who observes the lives of others. She is also a primary character who shares in the experiences she narrates. The story of Ruth's uprootedness is also one of Miss Nedden's emotional dilemma towards her and the other girl students. Not unlike Ruth, she experiences tension between passion and duty when dealing with the girls. She feels for Ruth, Ayesha and Kwaale, the three girls who are closest to her. Yet she also understands that she must adhere to her ethical expectations as a teacher, and must therefore not be emotionally entangled in the personal lives of her students. For example, even as she lets Ayesha scramble onto her lap in one of the scenes, she reminds herself that she must not develop a strong emotional bond with the girl.

I was careful -- we were all careful here -- not to establish bonds of great affection. As Miss Povey was fond of reminding us, these were not our children. But with Ayesha, the rule was sometimes hard to remember ... (115)

Ayesha is a little girl who was rescued from child prostitution and brought to the school for rehabilitation. We can therefore understand Miss Nedden's love and empathy for her.

Hence Miss Nedden emerges from this story not just as a narrator but also as one of the main characters whose experiences and emotional dilemmas we follow. As a narrator she is quite ideal. Her self-deprecating poise and tone causes a subtle irony and humour which make the story very enjoyable. As a character, however, she is not idealised. She has a gentle awareness of her own weakness which we also encounter as we read the story.

These weaknesses include her irascibility and gentle malice towards her colleagues.

Poised in a similar position as both narrator and primary character is Mathew, the English boy who is the autobiographical persona in "The Drummer of All the World". As narrator, Mathew tells us a great deal about others as he also reveals about himself. We learn of his father's conceited attitude towards African traditions, the bountiful motherly love of his nurse Yaa, the deceptively inviolable bond of kinship with his African "half-brother" Kwabena, and the rapturous encounter of his first love Afua. Through these people Mathew undergoes a full range of experiences such as love, kinship, romance, adventure, disappointment, guilt, remorse and self-realization.

In addition to this, we see Mathew's growing consciousness as he undergoes these experiences. In following his story, we witness his growing awareness of his own naivety about Africa and all the people surrounding him, his sense of guilt towards them, until he finally realises that his ostensible love for Africa is sterile. He realises, too, that he cannot easily exonerate himself from the collective guilt incurred by his European colonial ancestors in their historical influence in Africa. With frustration and remorse, he becomes aware that there is an unbridgeable gap of experience that separate him from his "half-brother" Kwabena. There is, too, a boundary between himself and his adopted motherland, Africa, which is unbreachable because it is firmly rooted in history.

As we follow Mathew's story, we deeply appreciate his growth towards self-realisation and true understanding. The first person narrative technique employed by the writer enables us to have an inside view of the narrator's changing consciousness. More than

this, the point-of-view enables us to see how the African world looks to an English boy who grows up in it, but who must forever remain a stranger to it.

Hence, we see that as I-narrators, Violet Nedden and Mathew observe and record the external experiences of others. But they also double up as characters in their respective stories, and therefore they also look inward into themselves. The external events which they observe as narrators are directed within, and lead them to a deeper understanding of themselves and of others. As both narrators and characters, they are able to focus our attention both outwardly and inwardly on the effect of these experiences on their consciousness within. Therefore in using narrators who are also primary characters, Laurence makes these stories a process of self-examination, or to use the words of Clara Thomas in her introduction to the stories, “a charting of consciousness and of growth” (xiii).

The narrative method in “The Pure Diamond Man” is equally rich. The story employs an innovative, albeit hazy combination of the first person and third person points-of-view. As the story opens at Paradise Chop-Bar, two childhood friends are brought together in a conversation reflecting on their youthful days. Tetteh is recounting to Daniel his reliance on good luck, which he personifies as his uncle. Then his explanation of his chance encounters edges us towards the real topic of the story, which is his melodramatic encounter with Philip Hardacre. Hardacre, we learn in the process, is an English traveller with outmoded ideas about Africa, whom Tetteh had luckily met in the same chop-bar.

Although the point-of-view in this preliminary scene is evidently third person, the section is dominated by Tetteh's first person account of his school days and his chance encounters. In this way a first person narrative voice is grafted onto the third person point-of-view. Then, when Tetteh pauses and says in his haphazard way, "on that remembered night, I was first setting my eyes upon my pure diamond man" (185), the scene is set for the retrospective narrative on his encounter with Philip Hardacre.

From this point on, the story unfolds through an external third person narrator who is not identified until the final section. As the story comes back to the narrative present, we are told that "The Paradise Chop-Bar was beginning to fill with mid-day customers as Tetteh finished" (202). We know then that Tetteh had imperceptibly transformed into a third person narrator to convey the story from a limited omniscient perspective.

In the last section of the story, yet another narrative voice is introduced through a letter which Tetteh had received from the Revered Timothy Quarshie. In the letter which Tetteh gives to Daniel to read, Rev. Quarshie explains what happened to Hardacre after Tetteh abandoned him in Gyakrom. In giving this explanation, the letter serves to fill the gap of information which Tetteh's narration had left. It answers the question Daniel poses towards the end of the story: "Did you ever hear what happened to Hardacre?" (202). This, too, is our question as readers. The story would be incomplete without supplying information to explain this.

However, in bringing in this letter, Laurence's skill as a plot maker appears to falter. The letter appears to be a "deus ex machina" which the writer invents to conclude the story. This is notwithstanding the fact that the information it conveys is relevant, and the incidents it narrates are probable and consistent with Hardacre's character. In spite of this, the letter itself appears unmotivated on the part of its author, the Reverend Quarshie. There is no precedence of any relationship between the clergyman and Tetteh such that he would write a letter to him. For this reason, we observe that it is crafted by the writer to fill the gap of information which her narrative has left, and to conclude the story.

This letter is not the only element of the narrative technique which cannot stand up to scrutiny. We are also bound to doubt Tetteh's transformation to a third person narrator in the second phase of the story, yet at the same time he remains a character in the action. We fail to perceive how Tetteh would narrate the story of his journey with Hardacre to Gyakrom, yet in doing so he does not refer to himself in the autobiographical first person. Again, we observe that the narrator in this section plays an omniscient role in observing the actions and motivations of all the characters, which Tetteh is incapable of because he is a human character.

These flaws apparently come about because Laurence employs a complex narrative technique which requires transformation of time, place and characters at several levels. For instance, narrative time, in much the same way as narrative voice, operates at two

discernible levels. Although the actual narrative time is restricted to the duration Tetteh and Daniel are together in the Paradise Chop-Bar, it is also extended into the past by the retrospective recollection of the encounter with Hardacre. Then we are again brought back to the present as Tetteh produces Reverend Quarshie's letter to conclude the story. It is probable that in juggling between these planes of time, place and character, Laurence loses grip of the narrative and the causes the flaws we have observed.

As mentioned earlier, dialogue provides an important complement to authorial narration in all these stories. In between narrative expositions we encounter intermittent portions of conversation between characters. These conversations not only advance action but also contribute to our overall understanding of the stories. More than this, the dialogue is a complement to characterisation in that it helps to reveal and individuate the various characters.

In her rendering of dialogue Laurence shows a keen interest in the minute speech nuances of her characters, which then helps her to individuate each one of them depending on their personal dispositions. We can see this use of dialogue to establish individuality when Brother Lemon and Will Ketrige meet at the airport in "Merchant of Heaven". As these expatriates stand side by side, their particular tendencies of character can be differentiated not only through their different dressing but also through their manner of speech. Brother Lemon appears at the airport "clad in a dove - grey suit of a miraculously immaculate

material” (51). This ostentatiousness as well as his fanatical piety are well evoked in his breathless ranting about his mission:

Our mission, you know, is based on the revelation of St. John the Divine. We believe there is a special message for us in the words given by the Spirit to the Angel of the Church in Philadelphia -- (52).

On the other hand, KetrIDGE turns up “wearing khaki trousers which badly needed pressing” (51). No doubt a cynic, his wry skepticism also comes through in his terse rejoinders to Brother Lemon: “A different Philadelphia, surely”, or “I hope the country comes up to your expectations, surely”(52).

The same effect of distinguishing the speakers is achieved through dialogue between African characters. Kobla Oware, one of the elders of Owurasu in “The Tomorrow-Tamer” is a man of quick temper, as his raucous outbursts betray. “Can they order us about as slaves?”, he demands of the foreigners who have come to construct a bridge at Owurasu.” We have men who have not forgotten their grandfathers were warriors” (86), he adds. This occurs at an elders’ crisis meeting called to discuss the unwelcome construction of a bridge at their village. In this tense moment, Nana Ayensu, a suave and charismatic elder, distinguishes himself with his becalming and cautious manner. “Compose yourself, Kobla”, he tries to prevail upon his fellow elder. “Remember that those of our spirit are meant to model their behaviour on that of the river. We are supposed to be calm” (86 - 87).

As we see from these examples, Laurence's characters speak with the tongues of themselves. Each is given an idiosyncratic speech which sets one aside from the rest. As a result of this, conversations between characters are conveyed with lucidity and captiveness. The characters are alive and varied, and they appear to us in all their shades and hues.

More than this, Laurence is able to render characters who are interesting, believable and memorable, even within the limited scope of the short story. Although the limited compass of the genre does not provide adequate medium for exploration of the character, in The Tomorrow-Tamer we are able to make lasting acquaintances with the main characters. Several other factors make this possible.

The first is the analytic intensity that Laurence employs as both a narrator and a creator. As a narrator, she describes her characters with such terseness that she is able to say a great deal about the protagonists within very limited space. In "Godman's Master" for example, we are given almost a complete biographical profile of Moses Adu only within the second paragraph: he is a "been to" who had stayed in England for four years studying pharmacy; he had bought a car, which he could hardly afford, because of the high expectations of his parents; he has been on a visit to his parents in their rural home, which had gone well; his father was happy about the car, his mother about the big job awaiting

him in the city. All this information unfolds within the space of only eleven lines, and without the writer being unduly direct or essayistic.

As a creator, Laurence makes her characters speak with such crispness that they are able to reveal a lot about themselves in a small space. In “The Perfume Sea”, Mr. Archipelago’s speech is so witty and to the point that we are able to familiarise with him within the first encounter.

Again, Laurence’s characters are memorable because they move us emotionally. The conflicts and struggles which motivate their stories are pertinently human and thus they appeal to something within us. This enables us to not only understand and empathise with them, but also to believe in their causes and take keen interest in what happens to them. As the conflict unfolds in “The Drummer of All the World”, we at once take the side of Mathew, the English boy whose feeling of being a stranger in a country that he had always thought to be his home appeals to our human sense of belonging. In “The Voices of Adamo”, our empathy reaches out to Adamo, the boy who is spurned by calamity out of the security of his home into an unrelenting wilderness. His relentless struggle to find his family appeals to our sensibility as human beings who know the value of community. Similarly, we do not hesitate to support the cause of the villagers of Owurasu in “The Tomorrow-Tamer”. The assault of their communal shrine and lifeline, and the fear of calamity that this engenders in them, move our own sense of survival. We tend to identify

with the characters involved in these struggles because in them we can see something of the universal human condition.

The accomplishment of characterisation in The Tomorrow-Tamer is also because of the writer's ability to restrict the number of main characters depicted in each story. In each of the stories, we follow the consciousness of a single dominant character, each of whom is a microcosm with some little world of his own which we get thoroughly acquainted with. This enables the writer to give us a sustained insight into an individual's world. Hence from the bustling market place in "A Gourdful of Glory", we follow the changing consciousness and fortunes of Mamii Ama. We trace the movements and encounters of Adamo from the community in "The Voices of Adamo", and the crusade and frustration of Brother Lemon in "A Merchant of Heaven".

However, even as these main characters are selected and their personal worlds are magnified in our perception, the other individuals in their surrounding do not vanish. Rather, they remain around in the background, in their subordinate presence commenting on and enhancing our understanding of the main characters. Besides this, the entire community is also kept in focus through its interaction with the hero.

Laurence's protagonist therefore is never the autonomous individual or the solitary egotist who lives isolated from the community. They are the ordinary, obscure men and women who are plucked out of the anonymity of their communal surroundings. For this reason,

the writer's selections for protagonists in various ways typify or illustrate the lives of the communities from which they emerge. Quite evidently, all of them are separate and distinct in their individuality. Each is presented with adequate individuating elements such as name, dress, appearance, speech and mannerism. Yet they also belong to a larger background than their individuality because they represent the experiences of their communities.

In "The Rain Child", we are left with no doubt that Ruth Quansah's sense of alienation is not unique. It is a condition which is to be found in many others. At the end of the story, as Miss Nedden reflects on the tribulations of this girl who is estranged to her motherland, she realises that this condition does not exist for Ruth only. Even herself, she faces a similar predicament as do many others:

Sitting in my garden and looking at the sun on the prickly pear and the poinsettia, I think of that island of grey rain where I must go as a stranger, when the time comes, while others must remain as strangers here. (133)

Similarly, Kofi's fate in "The Tomorrow-Tamer" is tragic, but not unique in his community. The spectacle of a man who is consumed by the gods is something which the people of Owurasu have no doubt experienced before:

Many tales were woven around his name, but they ended always in the same way, always the same.

The fish is netted and eaten; the antelope is hunted and fed upon; the python is slain and cast into the cooking pot. But -- oh, my

children, my sons -- a man consumed by the gods lives for ever (104).

The same goes for even the most peculiar of all the characters, Godman Pira, the dwarf-man in "Godman's Master". His near-fairy nature notwithstanding, he is, symbolically, only a single performer in a bigger cast on "the broad and grimy stage" of life. (160)

All these characters, then, expand in our perception to assume communal and even universal proportions. They illustrate something both of their communities and of the universal human condition. To them we relate something more significant than their personal destinies: their personal defeats or successes, their happiness or painful adjustments, their conflicts or rapprochement -- all these typify and comment on the lives of their communities, and of life in general.

For this reason, we can see the protagonists in The Tomorrow-Tamer as both realistic and allegorical. They are realistic because each is an ordinary individual, distinct and separate from all the others in their surroundings. But they are also allegorical because their individual experiences carry meanings that go beyond their narrow surroundings. Their experiences of exile and alienation, social uprootedness, the disruptiveness of change and the fickle nature of freedom, all these are representative of socially universal issues. Consequently, we see them as metaphors -- or images -- of change and survival.

Godman Pira, the protagonist in "Godman's Master" is certainly the most remarkable of these images. He is a dwarf-man who has been imprisoned in a box and used as an oracle for a long time, but after he is unexpectedly freed from his foul captivity he immediately throws himself at his saviour, convinced that he has found a new master to depend on. Moses Adu, Godman's saviour, realises that captivity, bondage and dependency have become second nature to the dwarf-man. Throughout his life, he has never been without an owner or master. This has enfeebled him so much that he believes he can only live by attaching himself to someone. He not only cannot fend for himself but he also cannot think independently. "You are clever. You will think of something" (147), he replies to Moses when he asks him what he will do after reaching the city. Although he proclaims that he wants to be a man, he is completely unaccustomed to non-dependent existence.

Godman fears the world of normal-sized men. In the city there are "so many people, and the noise, and those high buildings" (148) that he doubts his chances of surviving here. It is indeed true that in his puny size he would find himself helpless against any ordinary man, and especially in a society without protection for the weaker and where everything is shaped for the strong. However, his real weakness is not in his miniature physique, but in his psychological frailty. Since he has always belonged to some owner or the other, he believes he cannot live independently.

Godman's captors have led him not only to doubt his own humanity but also to believe in their own unassailable might. Whereas he sees himself as too small and weak to survive on

his own, he also believes in the awesome power of Faru, his former captor. "He sees through walls ... His eyes sees everywhere", he says of Faru.(146) . This stultifying psychological effect of his captivity is a worse weakness than his miniature physique.

It is not until Moses kicks him out of his house that Godman's struggle for survival begins. Out alone in the unrelenting world of normal-sized men, he goes through many harrowing experiences. As he relates them to Moses later, he "ate cat, and slept cold, and trapped cutting grass, and shrivelled in the sun like a seed" (158). In addition to this, he also finds new owners to attach himself to, such as the painted girl he pimped for or the mission band with which he sung for the white man's god. But above all this, when we meet him again, he has a proud story of his life to tell: "I have known the worst and the worst and the worst ... and yet I live. I fear and fear, and yet I live". (159) From a man who was so long a captive of his own fear and doubts, and who thought he could never live out there on his own, this proclamation is a proud celebration of survival.

But as Moses replies to him, "No man can do otherwise"(159). This is not just Godman's predicament, it is the human condition. To encounter and to weather the impediment to life, to fear, to suffer, and yet to be able to overcome all this is survival. This is the enduring struggle in The Tomorrow-Tamer.

As Patricia Morley contents in her essay in Margaret Laurence: An Appreciation.

Godman's story is "an analogue of human evolution, of the movement of the human spirit

towards independence and maturity” (18). Godman, then, is an image of imprisoned, reined in humanity, unnurtured and denied its very free existence. In making that important break for his freedom from Faru’s box and Moses’s house, he seeks not only physical but also spiritual liberation. However, outside his accustomed surroundings, he finds his miniature physique and debilitated spirit unprepared for the challenges of the world outside the box. He has no experience of freedom, and therefore as he finds himself so suddenly free, he hardly knows how to react to it. He knows only how to live in the sunless, airless shadows of other people’s boxes. It is no wonder therefore that he tries to implant himself on to new masters. Through him we come to appreciate the complex nature of freedom, for even without masters, it is possible to imprison ourselves in our self doubts and fear. Again, as Moses puts it, “ there is more to freedom than not living in a box” (155).

Godman can also be seen as a metaphor of the condition of many colonized people, although there is no such denotation in the story. Having lived so long in the shackles of imperialism, such people would not know what to do with political independence if it was suddenly granted. At independence many African countries were unwilling to assume full pledged freedom, to chart out their own destinies and to seek their fortunes in the free world. Not unlike Godman, many tried to cling onto their former colonial masters for political and economic dependency. This story therefore helps us to understand the stultifying effect of colonialism and the dependency syndrome that it built in the colonized nations. The fact that the story was written around the time of Ghana’s independence, a

period when many other African countries were poised for liberation, makes this analogy even more tenable.

The spectacle of independence in an African country is captured more directly in “A Gourdful of Glory”. In this story the drab life of Mamii Ama, a petty trader, is accentuated by the euphoric approach of independence in her country. For her independence is an immensely hopeful event which she expects to bring about a fantastic transformation of her life and an instantaneous cure for all problems of her community.

Mamii Ama is honest, ingenious and nimble-footed in her work. At the market place she is ebullient and warm-hearted towards all people. The narrator describes her thus:

She was honest -- true as God, she really was. You might claim that there were as many honest traders as there were elephants, and Mamii Ama would understand your meanings, and laugh, and agree with you. But she would let you know she was the one old cow elephant that never yet died off (225).

At home she is a responsible and loving family woman. She is always on her feet minding about her grown-up daughter Adua, and her grand daughter Comfort.

However, despite her humility and hard work, she is naive and ingenuous in her approach to the political changes anticipated in the country. She has a shallow albeit eager understanding of the implications of independence. She enthusiastically embraces the

empty, fiery speeches of politicians on the magic spectacle of independence, and believes their untenable promises of prosperity and bounty when freedom comes. She enthuses:

What dis t'ing, what dis Free- Dom? He be strong, he be fine fine too much. Ju-ju man be no got such t'ing, such power word. Dis Free - Dom he be same sun he be shine ... I tell you, dis Free-Dom he be sweet t'ing. You wait small, you see I tell you true. Market woman all day be queen mammy den (231).

To her then, freedom is a magic spectacle, an unimaginably sweet thing which is lustrous and powerful as the sun. With it she expects an omni-potent power that will cure all the problems of their country and transform them overnight into prosperous citizens. It will bring not only bounty but also benevolence, and henceforth they will not even pay bus fare: "Dat time, you t'ink we pay wen we deah go for bus?...We no pay! At all! Nevah one penny" (237).

Convinced of the unimpeachable power of freedom, Mamii Ama derides those who, like her colleague Sabina and her customer the white woman, try to disabuse her of these illusory hopes. She sees them as detractors who are opposed to the infinite goodness that independence promises. However, as the white woman cautions her, freedom's true detractors are not these but those sensationalist politicians who fan the ignorance of the masses and inspire a blind faith in the mystic power of independence.

Nevertheless, her moment of awakening is not long in coming. Independence, that "greatest of all great things" (239) comes with pomp. In its galvanizing euphoria, it is the

climax of Mamii Ama's expectations. No doubt, it carries an emotional rapture and a regal grandeur never seen in the country before:

The Day -- who could describe it? Commoners and princes, all together, the priest-kings of the Ga people, walking stately and slow. The red and gold umbrellas of the proud Akan chiefs, and their golden regalia carried aloft by the soul-bearers, sword-bearers, spokesmen, guards. From the northern desert, the hawk-faced chiefs in tent-like robes. The shouting young men, the frills in new cloth, the noise and the dancing, the highlife music, the soldiers in their scarlet jackets. The drums beating and beating for evermore. The feasting. The palm wine, everybody happy. Free-Dom. (240)

But then, after the excitement, the fatigue of everyday life comes back and disillusionment begins to sink in. On the first morning after independence Mamii Ama is shocked out of her stupor by the realisation that independence does not bring instantaneous change to her life, neither is it the easy solution to problems. Freedom or not, her breakfast is the same boiled yam and tea she had always taken, but which now tastes like "cold bile" in her mouth. On the bus ride to the market, she realises with shock that she still has to pay bus fare. Her usual drudgery at the market place, too, is not least changed by freedom.

Nevertheless, Mamii Ama does not break down or despair at these frustrations. Her spirit always resilient and buoyant, she gains new vigour and vitality from these experiences. If she does not find bounty in freedom at least she finds new pride and confidence in herself, as we witness when she faces the white woman at the market place:

...She had her power once more. He drumming heart told her what to do. Snake-swift, Mamii Ama snatched back the calabash, at the same time thrusting the coins into the woman's hand (242).

More important than this, she gains enlightenment as she now understands the meaning of freedom even better. Her new song captures this new pride and enlightenment:

Mamii Ama, she no come rich.
Ha-ei! Be so. On'y one penny.
She nevah be shame, she no fear for nothing.
D'time way come now, like queen she shine.

Although she may not be rich, at least she is free of shame and confident of herself. And indeed, like the queen she proclaims herself, in the final image we catch of her she is standing tall and proud, "like a royal palm rooted in magnificence, spreading her arms like fronds, to shelter the generations" (244).

In portraying Mamii Ama's naivety and consequent frustration, Laurence is not being skeptical about the capacity of Ghana's independence to improve the lives of the people. Rather, like the anonymous white woman in the story, she is trying to draw attention to the reality that independence does not carry any mystic power to transform a people. It may present greater opportunities and liberties, and it may be precious -- "like a piece of gold that somebody dashed you for nothing" (239) -- but it has no magic to transform a country or its people overnight. The real fortunes in independence, therefore, lie only in the ingenuity and hard work of the people.

Mamii Ama epitomises this ingenuity and hard work. She mirrors the resilient spirit of her people, their invigorating readiness to bounce back, and their unflinching determination to shake off all frustrations and still make the best out of independence. In a way, she echoes Godman Pira's optimism that "I have seen the worst... yet I live". She is also, like Godman, a positive image of the capacity of the African people to survive the adversities of change.

The advent of independence does not affect Africans alone. In "The Perfume Sea", independence is followed by a mass departure of European expatriates which is a source of dilemma and uncertainty to Mr. Archipelago and his colleague Doree. The two white expatriates run a small barber shop whose mainstay is hair care for European. With the departure of the Europeans in government service, Archipelago and Doree become aware that they will not have enough customers to keep them in business in this remote African coastal town. Their source of livelihood is suddenly eroded and they have nothing to fall back on. In these two characters therefore, we see the uncertainty that change engenders to people who were not prepared for it. But we also see how it is possible to survive all these uncertainties if one is willing to make adjustments to suit the new circumstances.

Archipelago and Doree are an intriguing pair whose identity is a mixture of truth and fiction. As they explain themselves to customers keen to know more about their obscure backgrounds, we find it difficult to know the borderline between fact and fabrication. In the isolated mansion where they reside, their names, origins, background, and their

relationship constitute a set of intrigues with which they keep the town's expatriate community guessing and gossiping. The intrigue of their identity and relationship is so intense that the pair maintains some kind of presence among the expatriate community, even though they are considered as socially non-existent.

Their names are one of the main sources of curiosity. Mr. Archipelago, who is inordinately fascinated with words, says that his name derives from the fact that his father was a sailor. Therefore, he is "archipelago", which he found defined in the Concise Oxford Dictionary as "oyster spawn". Since his father was an itinerant creature of the sea like the oyster fish, he becomes archipelago, the spawn of the fish.

But the name has another deeper significance for him. Archipelago is also defined in the Concise Oxford as "a sea with many islands" (26). He sees this as essentially defining his life as well. His life has been like a sea with many island, a shifting existence with no firm foothold or fixed abode. However, in the many islands of his life, he feels that in Africa he has found one which can endure. He has lived in Africa for twelve years and would like to possess this as his permanent abode.

However, with the departure of the Englishmen in government service Archipelago and Doree suddenly become aware that they will not have enough customers to sustain them

here. These abrupt and unexpected circumstances threaten their livelihood, and deep gloom and uncertainty sets in their lives. Archipelago ponders their predicament in his witty manner: "A sea with many islands ... Sometimes it happens that a person discovers he has built his house upon an island that is sinking".(30) Can they survive this erosion of their last fortress of hope? What chance do they have in this wilderness after most of their clients have left?

Even as they find themselves in such dire straits, Archipelago and Doree do not opt for what appears to be the most logical thing to do. Rather than pack and leave for home with the rest of the Europeans, they choose to hold out against their dwindling fortunes. The period of gloom and uncertainty which they are caught in turns out to be the most revealing in the story.

We learn that both of them cannot, or would not, go back home for reasons which they understand mutually without even discussing. In addition to this, we learn not just of their hopes and fears, but also of their humane thoughtfulness and kindness towards each other. They have genuine empathy for each other's misery and despair, and they reach out to help each other without passion or indulgence. Archipelago offers to part with his gold necklace -- which is everything he has -- so that he can give Doree at least another chance in life. This is an act of utter sacrifice which deeply touches not just Doree but also us. Not only this but also Doree's refusal to take the necklace even when faced with such despair is an incomparable gesture of humanism.

Their choice not to leave like the rest of the Europeans is partly because to them, “home” abroad is an undependable place which presents as much uncertainty as does Africa. We learn that they live here as exile because there is really little for them to turn back to in Europe. Archipelago talks of home quite often, sometimes with nostalgia, but mostly with cynicism:

I grew up there. That Genoa! Never go there. A port town, a sailors town. The most saddening city in the world, I think. The ships are always mourning. You hear those wailing voices even in your sleep. The only place I ever liked in all Genoa was the Staglieno Cemetery, up on the hills. I used to go there and sit beside to tombs of the rich, a small fat boy with the white marble angels -- so compassionate they looked, and so costly--I believed then that each was the likeness of a lady buried beneath. The I would look over at the field of rented graves nearby... (25-26).

To him, home is this place where his only sanctuary was among the graves, and it is no wonder therefore that he never intends to go back to this town of his childhood. That home is now only a relic in his rich memory.

Laurence depicts with sympathy and understanding these two misfits who no longer belong anywhere. Marooned in despair as they are in this remote town, Archipelago and Doree evoke the double solitude of the Italian exiles depicted in The Prophet's Camel-Bell. Like the Italians in Somaliland, they are exiled here because there is really nothing to go back to in their homes in Europe. It is only in Africa that they have hope of owning anything, such as their house and business. Their lives here are neither romantic nor

rewarding, but they could have it worse in Europe. They would even be exiles and strangers in their own homes if they went back to people whom they have been away from for so long. Therefore, like the Italians in Somaliland, they take what this country can offer, and live from day to day.

However, in this twilight of their fortunes, Archipelago and Doree do not bury themselves in self-pity or despair. They understand that the prevailing changes are inevitable and accept to adjust to the circumstances. In a sudden bout of ingenuity, Archipelago discovers that they could change their business from curling hair to straightening it, and therefore attract African customers in the place of the departing Europeans. Herein lies their chance for survival, because they soon find themselves in business again.

This change of business line and the instant success it brings may appear simplistic. However, it embodies an essential truth about the ability of human beings to improve their fortunes in the face of adversity. We realise that like Archipelago and Doree, any human beings, from whatever background, with whatever handicaps, have a chance to change their fortunes, if only they are willing to accept the prevailing changes and adjust accordingly. Archipelago and Doree survive the changes brought about by independence because they eschew social stiffness. They accept and adopt to the circumstances surrounding them. Moreover, they have also accepted and tried to harness the African world in which they live. Archipelago's garden, with its profusion of elephant grass and wild orchids as well as Doree's managerie of animals from the African bush, symbolise

their adaptation to and attempt to possess the African world. Along with these, they keep pet parrots which are given the quasi-Italian names “Silvo” and “Brasso”, as a mark of their subtle attachment with their European origins.

Archipelago and Doree escape the prospect of becoming exiles in their own homes in Europe. However, this fate catches up with Ruth Quansah, the sixteen year old protagonist in “The Rain Child”. Ruth is the image of the peculiar exile who finds herself mislocated in her own country. She mirrors the painful desolation of social uprootedness which is the result of growing up away from one’s people.

Born and brought up in England by Ghanaian parents, Ruth has acquired English mannerisms and tastes, and has even come to see England as her homeland. Now at the age of sixteen years, she has come back to Ghana where she joins Eburaso Girls School. She is immediately assailed by the unfamiliar African social surroundings, which she finds both alien and hostile. Her arrogance and reticence towards other girls in school exacerbates her alienation from the entire school community.

Unable to cope with the unfamiliar African milieu in school, Ruth begins to gravitate towards David Mackie, an English boy who lives with her mother in the neighbourhood of the school. David’s hobby is collecting and keeping wild animals, and Ruth is quite elated about this pastime. She enthusiastically explains to her teacher about it:

I have been helping David with his animals... You know Miss Nedden, he wants to be an animal collector when he's through school. Not a hobby--he wants to work at it always. To collect live specimens, you see, for places like Whipsnade and Regents Park Zoo. He's lent me a whole lot of books about it. It is awfully interesting, really it is (123).

Ruth is drawn to David because he shows Africa to her through English eyes, which is how she would see it. David's view of Africa provides her with the excitement and sense of exotism which she does not find among the other girls in school. His high sense of adventure also gives her a much needed recourse from her solitude among the unfamiliar girls in school. Unfortunately, this new friendship also isolates her more than ever from the other girls and from the local life which she should be getting accustomed to.

To check against this, Miss Nedden, her teacher, persuades her to learn the language of her people so that she can at least interact with the other girls. The task of teaching Ruth her month-tongue is assigned to Kwaale, a girl who is presented in stark contrast to Ruth. Kwaale has grown up among her people, and in her bearing and speech, she exudes the dignity of their culture. Her social mien is rich in local colour and wisdom, which she expresses so often in her proverb-laden language. Kwaale represents everything that Ruth has missed through her sixteen years in England.

Maintaining contact with both David Mackie and Kwaale means that Ruth has one foot in the exotic world of the English boy and the other in the indigenous world of the African

girl. If she can keep a foothold in each of these two half worlds, then the girl would be in the process of cultural reconciliation and synthesis.

Ruth's half worlds, however, shatter with cruel reality when the Odwira festival comes. The festival is a traditional ceremony where ritual sacrifices and dances are performed to cleanse the community. Accompanying Kwaale to this wildly exciting event, Ruth is shocked and appalled by its raw sensuality while Kwaale is emotionally consumed in the celebrations. Ruth is so shocked that she bolts away, unable to withstand the sensual performance that Kwaale puts up.

The clash that ensues between the girls is essentially one of cultures. Whereas Kwaale fully relishes the sensual histrionics of the occasion, including the "fire a gun" gesture, Ruth finds it extremely indecent. This shows the unintelligibility of their upbringing and their social perspectives. Ruth's reaction in running away from the festival should not be seen as puerile. It is out of the culture shock that is caused by contact with alien customs.

Spurned by Kwaale, Ruth runs off to David Mackie. Even here, she painfully learns that she is not fully acceptable. David does not regard her as an equal companion, as he abashedly reveals to her: "...I know you are not the ordinary kind of African. You're almost -- almost like a -- like us." To her this is both rejection and insult, and worse so coming from the only place where she expected to find refuge. From the Mackie's she flees to the dilapidated hut of Yindo, a servant boy employed at the school.

Yindo is a sixteen year old boy who had come to Eburaso from his far away home in the northern desert. He is “one of the scores of young who were herded down each year to work in the cocoa farms because their own arid lands had no place for them”(118). No one here knows his language and he has no kinsman although he is desperate to live and belong here. He is also a socially dislocated child like Ruth or Ayesha, another young girl who was brought to Eburaso for rehabilitation after she had been sold as a child prostitute in Lagos.

Ruth’s flight from the Odwira festival, from the Mackie’s, and finally into Yindo’s arms has a deeper significance. It implies that Ruth has finally found where she belongs. It is neither in the ornately traditionalist world of Kwaale nor in the exoticism of David Mackie, but in the desolate camp of “the outcast children” (132) like Yindo and Ayesha.

In referring to Ruth, Ayesha and Yindo as “the outcast children” (132), the narrator invites a comparison of the plight of the three. All three have been uprooted from their homes and cast together at Eburaso, where they find communion in their shared predicament of social dislocation. Their coming together at Yindo’s hut towards the close of the story is symbolic of this shared predicament. Ironically, Miss Nedden, the narrator who captures their plight and brands them “the outcast children”, is one of their lot. She realises at the end of the story that she too, like each of the children, is an exile and she will have to go back to England when her time comes: “I think of that island of grey rain

where I must go as a stranger, when the time comes, while others must remain as strangers here” (133).

Ruth’s social uprootedness and anguish at Eburaso mirrors the experience of her late mother in England, where she had migrated to accompany her husband. She had moved to England unwillingly and although she hated the place, she was compelled to live in the unfavourable surrounding rather like “a plant expected to grow where the soil is not suitable for it”(120). The African name which she gave to Ruth means “child of the rain”. This name reflects her desolation, loneliness and her longing for home in Africa. It is ironical that in coming back to the home which her mother had longed for in Africa, Ruth experiences the same uprootedness and desolation of her mother in England. Ruth faces this predicament because like her mother, she refuses to adjust to the new social situation in which she finds herself in Africa. She prefers to cling to her English upbringing even though this is irrelevant to her African milieu. Just like her mother refused to yield to life in England, Ruth turns her back to the African world, and in so doing aggravates her alienation.

In “The Drummer of All the World”, Mathew is the reverse image of Ruth. Whereas Ruth is an African girl who has been born and brought up in England, Mathew is an English boy who has grown up in Africa. Mathew goes to England when he is about the same age as Ruth when she came to Africa. Therefore the English boy is able to capture for us the experience of African childhood that Ruth misses.

Mathew's childhood in Africa was idyllic. He grew up in a small fishing village on Africa's west coast where his father was a missionary. To his child eyes, this was an unspoiled, romantic surrounding of great beauty and adventure. It is the boy's dream world of wonder and "half pleasurable terror"(1). However, the warmth and companionship he gets from his African friend Kwabena and his nurse Yaa is punctuated by the gloomy images of his parents. His father is a tenaciously crusading missionary who, in his conceit, thought that he was bringing salvation to Africa. His mother is a tired, "very pale and thin woman who always had malaria" (2)

His childhood has left him profoundly marked with these memories of romance and adventure, the motherly warmth of Yaa and the brotherly companionship of Kwabena. He therefore comes to see Africa as his home, Kwabena as his brother, and Yaa his mother. However, when he comes back to Africa after ten years absence, he is surprised, even deeply hurt, to realise that there were certain experiences of these people that were separate from him. He had only shared in their enchantment and adventure, never in their struggles and suffering. He can now see and feel the difference between the romantic Africa of his boyhood, and the real Africa which the blur of childhood had shielded from him.

At first, the romance of childhood still characterises his memory of that past. But then he encounters Kwabena:

I met Kwabena accidentally on the street in Accra...He looked disconcertingly serious, but when he smiled it was the same grin, and for a moment I thought it was going to be alright. But when I gave him the Twi greeting, he did not reply to it (14).

In Kwabena's sourness towards him he can sense the reality that he had escaped in his childhood. In the changes that he finds in the land and the people, there is a terrible truth which had escaped his boy's indifferent eyes in the past. He could not notice the filth, sorrow and suffering that plagued the Africans around him in his childhood. At least he could not see this as clearly as Kwabena must have. This is because Kwabena was part of this world while Mathew was not.

Between Mathew and Kwabena we can see the contrast between the outsider and the insider. As an outsider, Mathew loves the old Africa and wants its antique quaintness to remain unchanged. He is honest enough to confess this:

It was only I who could afford to love the old Africa. Its enchantment had touched me, its suffering--never. Even my fright had stopped this side of pain. I had always been the dreamer who knew he could waken at will, the tourist who wanted antique quaintness to remain unchanged (18).

Kwabena, on the other hand, is an insider who is trapped in this world forever. The enchantment of the land and its suffering are equally his, and he knows that he cannot get away from it.

Therefore Mathew's love for Africa, as he abashedly owns up, is the sterile love of an outsider. Between him and Kwabena on Yaa is a vast gap of experiences which he cannot breach by simply loving them. However, he also cuts the image of the immensely conscientious individual who takes upon himself the collective, historical guilt of the past. He owns up not only the guilt of his misconception of Africa, but also that of his father, the idol breaker who assaulted African traditions and customs. Not only this but he also owns up the blame due to the European colonialists in Africa:

We were conquerors in Africa, we Europeans. Some despised her, that bedraggled queen we had unthroned, and some loved her still-raging magnificence, her old wisdom. But all of us sought to force our will upon her (18).

His facing up to this guilt is his way of seeking redemption for his tormented soul. In doing this, he holds up the image of his father and his colonial forebears, for these are the damned against whom he could measure his personal redemption.

As Mathew redeems himself in our eyes, Kwabena's sourness towards him seems gratuitous. They had lived their childhood innocently together, and now to remind Mathew of the rancour that had escaped them in that past seems mean-spirited. That past is something to be forgotten out of goodwill. Even his forgiveness is misplaced here, because it seems ungenerous to imply that there is anything to forgive.

Our sympathies therefore go out to Mathew, who takes upon himself to shoulder the collective guilt of his forebears, even though he cannot be held to account for any of that guilt. His remorse is as genuine as his love for Africa and his friendship for Kwabena. He is remorseful not because charity demands it, but because he recognises that there is something substantial to be remorseful about. With Kwabena prodding his conscience, he remembers and feels more vividly than ever the injustice of the colonial past. And he has reason to remember and feel all this, for in doing so, he reminds us also what colonialism implied of human relationships. The fact that Mathew and Kwabena, who as children were suckled by the same woman, now in their adulthood see each other through the smoke screen of colonialism, best illustrates the tragic impact of this era on human relationships.

Kofi, the tragic protagonist in the title story "The Tomorrow - Tamer", represents the summation and the central image of change and survival in these stories." In this story, the isolated village of Owurasu makes its first contact with an unfamiliar outside world through the construction of a bridge. This project is an immensely significant event for the community, for it brings around foreigners hitherto unseen in this remote village. As it turns out, the project has both constructive and destructive consequences on the social fortunes of the community.

On the one hand, the construction work promises bounty because it will offer employment to the young men of Owurasu. The prosperity this brings about can be seen through Danquah's shop, which is the barometer of the material well-being of Owurasu:

In the "Hail Mary Chop-Bar" the young men of Owurasu began to swagger. Some of them now kept for themselves a portion of the money they earned. Danquah, bustling around his shop, pulled out a box of new shirts and showed them off... Entranced, the young men stared. A bottle of beer, Danquah urged. Would the young men have another bottle of beer while they considered the new shirts? They drank, and pondered, and touched the glittering cloth (90-91).

On the other hand, the community is afraid that the construction of the bridge will upset the calm of Owura, the powerful river god of the village whose abode is the site earmarked for the bridge.

The emerging conflict of expectations is best mirrored in the words of two elders, Nana Ayensu and Okomfo Ofori, as they contemplate the project. Nana Ayensu, the village chief, favours the project. He observes that the young men who would work at the bridge "would be paid, and Owurasu is not rich" (87). But Okomfo Ofori, priest of the river god, fears that the Owura would not suffer his river to be disturbed. He warns:

If he will not, then I think fish will die from the river, and the oil palms will wither, and the yams will shrink and dwindle in the planting places, and plague will come, and river-blindness will come, and the snake will inhabit in our huts because the people are dead, and the strangler vine will cover our dwelling places. For our life comes from the river, and if the god's hand is turned against us, what will avail the hands of men? (87)

The community is torn both ways by their simultaneous fear and desire for the project. As they are caught in this dilemma, they clearly understand that a sacrifice has to be made. Unfortunately, this sacrifice has to be more substantial than the wine usually poured in libation to the river god:

Libation would be poured to the ancestors and to the god of the river, as a propitiation for the disturbance of the waters. Also, one young man had been selected to go to the bridge work...as man will be sent to test the footing around a swamp (89)

Kofi, the young man selected to test the swamp before the community can take the plunge is not just a fore-runner but also a sacrifice. His peers see him as a chief of sorts as he captains the young men who later come to work at the bridge. He is seen by the elders as a scout put in the vanguard to blaze the trail in this uncertain venture, while he perceives himself as priest of the bridge, the new god that has supplanted Owura at the river. However, he eventually emerges as a sacrifice offered to the river god by the community which is overawed by it.

Kofi also represents the consciousness of the community. He embodies the dilemma of Owurasu as the village contemplates this uncertain project. As the construction gets underway, we see in him the anguish of the community as Owura's sacred grove is invaded by the bridge builders' bulldozer:

The bulldozer rammed another tree, and it toppled, its trunk snapping like a broken spine. Kofi felt as though his own bones were being broken, his own body assaulted, his heart invaded by the massive blade (93).

He mirrors also the vulnerability of the community whose quietude is now invaded and its lifeline assailed by the strangers. Eventually, he also bears the tragedy that follows in this project's wake.

Nevertheless, while the rest of Owurasu hesitates, Kofi enthusiastically embraces the bridge work. He is increasingly absorbed by the work and the company of the bridge men at the "Hail Mary Chop-Bar" and thus becomes isolated from his family and the village community. His ambition is to be not just a mere bridge man, but eventually to become a veteran like Emmanuel, and this means he increasingly separates himself from his family. He can no longer spare enough time for his newly-wed wife, he has no patience with his father, nor can he even remember to visit his aged grandmother. Instead, he looks forward to leaving the village to work in far off places.

Kofi is so consumed in his change from village boy to bridge man that he becomes overconfident as he absorbs some of the brashness of the bridge men. He is even bold enough to proclaim in the presence of a council of elders that the bridge has "something stronger as Owura himself" (99). He gives the bridge the great status of a new god, and he, the foremost bridge man in Owurasu, is its priest. Or even more than just a priest:

...He was no longer the bridge's priest, but now the thought could be borne. He was fearless, fearless as Emmanuel. He knew the work of the bridge. In far off places, men would recognise him as a bridge man. The power of it went with him and in him. Exultant, he wanted to shout aloud his own name and his praises. There was nothing he could not do...(102).

Thus consumed in his conceit and fearlessness, Kofi drives himself to ruin. He is not satisfied to be able to climb to the high steel of the bridge, "high above the forest and the river" (102-3) and even above the bridge itself. He is bold enough, even from this point, to look the sun straight in the eye:

Then he did something Emmanuel would never have done on the high steel--he looked up. The brightness of the bridge seemed strangely to pale in the sunfire that filled his eyes. For an instant he looked straight into the sun. Then, blinded, he swayed and his foot slipped on the silver paint. He pitched forward, missing the bridge entirely, and arched into the river like a thrown spear (103).

Kofi thus perishes at the bridge; but his death, despite all the grief it brings to the village, is hardly a surprise to the people of Owurasu. In this tragedy they see an invaluable sacrifice which would mollify the anger of the river god as it atones for the desecration of Owura's shrine. More than this, Kofi is seen as a propitiatory gift that will win for the villagers the favour of the bridge, the strange god that has come to live in Owura's shrine. As a result of this great sacrifice, the bridge henceforth is not an exotic intrusion into their cosmic universe. It becomes part of Owurasu, and the villagers feel that they understand it now: "...The bridge, clearly, had sacrificed its priest in order to appease the river. The people felt that they knew the bridge now..."(103).

In addition to this, Kofi's death appropriates the bridge and makes it a part of Owurasu.

It also affirms the unassailable supremacy of the river god over the bridge:

Kofi had been the first to recognise the shrine, but he had been wrong about one thing. The bridge was not as powerful as Owura. The river had been acknowledged as elder. The queenly bridge had paid its homage and was part of Owurasu at last (103).

The bridge, then, is both a physical and a mystic edifice. In its awesome monstrosity it dominates the site at the river where it supplants the river god's grove. But above this, it commands an imposing presence in the villagers' epiphanic consciousness. They imbue it with mystic power. It is the new god which has come to live in Owura's shrine, and therefore a mystic competitor to the river god.

The bridge also has a symbolic significance. It is a symbol of change that connotes the beginning of transition for Owurasu. Together with a new road that is being constructed through the forest, it will string the village to a hitherto little known outside world, perhaps even to the big city which Nana Ayensu mentions. Thus the village will be opened up to external influences and its isolation would end.

For Kofi the bridge is also a symbol of transition. On the one hand it represents a period of his transformation from childhood to maturity. His first outing is when he leaves his father's household to live and work with the bridge men. This outing also occasions his first contact with outsiders, and subsequently his first taste of responsibility. When

tragedy strikes, he is in the process of transition from a “bush-boy” to a bridge man like Emmanuel, who can sing of “the silk-clad women of the city” (97) On the other hand the bridge is a line between life and death which Kofi crosses unwittingly. In his overzealous service to it, he fails to recognise the danger which it portends and therefore hazards his own life.

Kofi’s death, however, is not in vain. To adopt Ngugi wa Thiongo’s consummate metaphor in A Grain of Wheat, he is like a grain which falls to the ground, dies alone, but brings forth much fruit to the community and to posterity. Although he perishes at the bridge he is not altogether lost. His death helps to harness the bridge for his people and to ameliorate their spiritual life. Kofi’s death is a germinal tragedy that makes him like a grain of wheat. It tames the bridge and promises a brighter future for his people. The fruits of this seed can be seen in the awesome bridge, which is also a towering monument to his sacrifice.

Moreover, Kofi does not wholly die since even in death he lives among his people. They immortalise his name in their folklore as many tales are woven in his praise. The fact that he does not wholly die is captured here in the wisdom of the community:

The fish is netted and eaten; the antelope is hunted and fed upon,
the python is slain and cast into the cooking pot. But--oh, my
children, my sons--a man consumed by the gods lives for ever
(104).

In his fortunes and fate, Kofi sums up the images of change and survival in The Tomorrow-Tamer. As the “tomorrow-tamer” who harnesses the future for his community, Kofi is also the central image in this collection of short stories. He represents the courageous and ingenious hero who puts himself in the vanguard to test the footing around a swamp before the community can move ahead. In the face of all the uncertainties occasioned by change, societies cannot forge forward, and communities cannot progress or even survive, without heroes like Kofi.

This unyielding courage and resilience forms the backdrop to most of the protagonists in The Tomorrow-Tamer. The courage to strike out into the unknown as Adamo and Godman do -- and when hopes are not realised -- the resilience to bounce back and begin all over again like Mamii Ama or Mr. Archipelago do, are the best tools for survival in the face of all the uncertainties that change brings about.

In the images of these protagonists, Laurence encapsulates her optimism for the African communities as they grapple with the uncertainties of social change. As Clara Thomas notes in her introduction to the short stories, the Africans Laurence depicts do not “bow down in despair of calamity, or death, or disillusion” (xv). They have a capacity for adaptability which enables them to bounce back and to triumph over calamity or disillusion. Because of this they are able to survive despite all the adversities of change.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the portraiture of Africa in Margaret Laurence's African works, and has found that in various ways, the author presents a positive and optimistic image of contemporary African society. At the same time we have examined the writer's exposure and condemnation of European colonialism in Africa as well as the racist imperialist attitudes of white expatriates who demeaned and dehumanized Africans, in the process elevating, isolating and alienating themselves from the rest of the society. In this conclusion we will sum up Laurence's images of Africa as revealed in this study and restate the writer's achievements in these three works.

In looking at the personal and literary biography of Margaret Laurence, we have analyzed the influences of her childhood in Canada and travels in Africa and Europe in enriching the themes of her vast literary works. We not only reveal Laurence as an enlightened traveler and a consummate artist, but also underscore the seamless unity of her African and Canadian works. The crucial importance of Africa in the evolution of the writer's artistic vision is affirmed. Africa is shown to be the germinal ground from which Laurence honed her creative subtleties, and most important of all, learned to probe the nature of human freedom, which is the enduring theme of her works.

In looking at Laurence's image of the Somali people and their culture in The Prophet's Camel-Bell we show that Laurence depicts the Somali people with genuine human sympathy and understanding and goes out to show how they cope with dignity and

determination in their severe desert milieu. The writer affirms the validity and relevance of the Somali culture and castigates those imperialists who look down upon it.

In looking at Laurence's image of the nation of Ghana at transition to independence and of the nation's transition generation in This Side Jordan, we have shown that the writer presents positive and memorable images of contemporary African society. She underscores her optimism in the society's capacity to rise up to the challenges of independence, while at the same time revealing her distaste for imperialism and the imperial clique in Africa.

Finally, we have analyzed the short stories collected under the title The Tomorrow-Tamer, where social change is shown as the main imperative influencing the lives of various protagonists and their communities. Laurence aptly depicts the people's overriding concern for survival in the face of this all-pervasive influence of change, and through the stories of various protagonists illustrates the ingenuity of the Africans and their ability to survive the adversities of change.

On the whole therefore, this study has proved the hypotheses that Margaret Laurence's African works create a positive image of African society and condemn imperialism as an undue inhibition on human freedom. More than this, in recognising the inescapable interpenetration between literary form and content, the study has also given a deep analysis of the constructional elements of each work, which, in any case, bear on the writer's

portraiture of Africa. Now it only remains to be shown what the writer achieves in her African works.

The writer's achievement in these works is that she goes a long way to correct the denigrative image of Africa which has been perpetuated by other Western writers for a long time. As has been shown in this study, Laurence's writing on Africa is deeply conscious of the negative stereotypes in which other writers have represented Africans. The author therefore writes with a sense of responsibility -- in fact a sense of mission -- in an attempt to correct this negative image. Right from the outset in The Prophet's Camel-Bell, she takes the colonial writer's representation of Africa with distrust, and therefore delves deeper than the surface impressions to bring out what she sees as the true image of Africa, and the folly of those who falsify it.

Laurence portrays Africa as a dynamic and dignified society, with a people full of the warmth and energy of life, and an abounding capacity to adjust to the changes taking place in their world. African culture has a certain vitality which she admires and respects. However, even as she admires this culture, she is honest enough to acknowledge her separateness from it.

The writer contents that cultural diversity is inevitable. However, this diversity notwithstanding, she enunciates cross-cultural understanding and tolerance. She accomplishes this in two ways: first, through her depiction of the unwholesomeness of

cultural self-righteousness in her characters. She also propagates a case for cultural understanding through her method of depicting individuals and communities, whose essence is feeling with the others, and looking at the world through their eyes, regardless of their cultural outlook. Always careful not to be indifferent to other people's way of life, the writer depicts African communities with generous understanding and sympathy. She takes in all the dignity of the people and the beauty of the land, while still, in her humane perspective, being aware of the inevitable dents in it.

Throughout the three works explored, Laurence is fully aware of her inadequate grasp of both the human complexity of the Africans as well as their world. For this reason, her portraiture of Africa is careful and hesitant. She confesses that it is not possible to blow in from the sea and seize up a land's centuries in a few months. Unlike those colonial expatriates she depicts who oversimplify Africans in a few dismissive, often derogatory phrases, the writer finds the African way of life deep and intricate.

As she looks at Africa with optimism, she views colonialism with great resentment, and disavows the European imperial influence in Africa as an undue interference in another people's life. The uncomplimentary portraits of the imperialists which she creates are testimony to her resentment of their role in Africa.

Another of her achievements in these works, therefore, is that as she vindicates Africa from denigration, she also succeeds in repositing the image of the European expatriate in

Africa. Whereas the expatriates view themselves as emissaries of civilisation in Africa, and as superior over the Africans in their moral values, Laurence portrays them as socially dislocated exiles who are estranged both from their homelands and from themselves. Many of the whites she depicts are propelled to Africa not by their sense of obligation to a society in dire need of service or salvation, but by their own dire need to ameliorate their livelihoods, and, for some, to heal the social wounds inflicted by their homeland in Europe. For others, their projection onto Africa becomes a reflection of their own ignorance and folly.

Therefore as this study has shown, in her African works Laurence creates a positive and optimistic image of Africa, affirms her respect for the Africans' way of life and asserts their right to be different from the Europeans in their culture and world view. Her works depict a world in which Africans are duly acknowledged and respected. Quite appropriately, the inexorable culprits of this world are those cockeyed colonials who never respect others. These white men should not see themselves, to borrow her words, "as crusaders in a desperate darkness ... but a people in a world of people both different and similar to themselves" (The Prophet's Camel Bell, 252).

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