

Thoughts about Books

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I was blown away by a book this evening. Alone here at the farm...but for a puppy who was busy chewing a pillow at the time...I sat on the porch with a glass of wine and began a book called CROW LAKE by Mary Lawson.

Mary Lawson, the author info tells me, is a Canadian who lives in England. I sat there wondering what it is about Canadian women authors. Maybe this is a huge over-generalization, but I have found Canadian women authors...Carol Shields*, Margaret Lawrence, Margaret Atwood, among others...to be the writers who have most compelled me with their fiction in recent years.

Canada is, of course, a huge country with vast areas of isolation. I remember traveling by train across Canada in 2001, and as the twice-a-week train chugged through a one-street town - where it did not stop, where it never stopped - a man standing in a second floor window turned, dropped his trousers, and mooned the passengers watching from the train windows. I remember wondering about that man. Did he look forward with glee to those Tuesday and Thursday events? Or were they a chore (man looks at watch, groans, says: "Oh god, it's almost 3 o'clock; gotta go pull my pants down again")?

Not much to do in a place like that, and less, I suppose, for a woman. Does it make an intelligent woman introspective, creative, observant, literate?

Mary Lawson is all of that and more.

Thinking of my own young self, in an attempt to answer the question - often asked - of what made me a writer, I have often thought that it was the combination of introversion and dislocation. In other words...I was always very shy (introversion) and my family, because of my father's work, moved frequently (dislocation). Without the outgoing child's ability to fit in quickly, make new friends easily, I was much more given to being an observer (a necessity for a writer),

a ponderer, and a recorder. Of course coming from an educated and literate family, and eventually acquiring a good education, played a role as well.

But I am thinking now about the vastness of the Canadian landscape; there is such a feel of that, in this book CROW LAKE (though I have only read the first 50 pages), and of implacable fate in the lives of these land-rooted people.

It just occurred to me to google Mary Lawson and I found an interview, in which she says: "The community I grew up in was larger than Crow Lake, less isolated, much less homogeneous, and less remote, but it was isolated enough that people depended on each other, and took care of each other. There is a downside to small communities of course – they are hell on earth for those who don't fit in – but I remember it with affection, and Crow Lake is in some respects a tribute to it."

She says a lot else, as well, and I will go and read the rest. But in the meantime I just wanted to say that it is a wonderful moment to be sitting alone on a porch at sunset and to realize you are reading an amazing book.

* Yes, it's true that Carol Shields was born and grew up in the USA. But her adult writing life was in Canada.

Tags: Untagged