The (in)authenticity of the Prairie: elsewhereness and insideness in Margaret Laurence's Manawaka series

Ben P. Cecil and Lynn A. Cecil,
University of Regina

Abstract: This paper addresses the reinvention of Prairie space and place through the development of Margaret Laurence's Manawaka series. In her attempt to create the quintessential Prairie town, the 'insideness' of the place she understood as the Neepawa of her childhood permeated the 'elsewhereness' of the fictional town of Manawaka – and, thus, she has forever changed the literary record of the Prairie and our perceptions of that space. Through literary place reconstruction and cognitive mapping, it is shown how the 'elsewhere' landscape of Laurence's fictional Manawaka space is encroaching upon and imbuing its sense of place and its inauthenticity on the actual town of Neepawa.

Contextualization of the Prairie in the Manawaka Series

Margaret Laurence's Manawaka world was *created* as the quintessential Prairie town for 'every man and every woman' with particularities that are emphatically Canadian (Thomas 1975; Payne 1998; Payne 2001). Laurence envisioned a fictional town that could represent any Prairie town in Canada, with qualities and characteristics that typified Prairie living – the rail lines, grain elevators, socio-cultural divisions, a strong work ethic, and a 'traditional' Prairie landscape. In what has been called "the most extensively and consistently developed town in Canadian literature" (Thomas 1975, 174), Laurence has developed a literary record of Prairie life through the creation of the Manawaka series – five books (*The Stone Angel, A Jest of God, The Fire-Dwellers, A Bird in the House,* and *The Diviners*) about the lives and events of the people in the fictional Manitoba town of Manawaka.

The fictional/literary world of Manawaka was highly grounded in contextual space, so much so that one may place the literary world of Laurence's creation in the context of actual location. It is through Laurence's deep understanding of 'place' and her 'insideness' with respect to that place that allows the reader of the Manawaka series to experience, in a literary context, the representative Prairie town she hoped to convey (see Figure 1).

The combination of actual location and the fictionalization of location are oft referred to as 'elsewhereness' (Relph 1976; Tuan 1961; Tuan 1974). Elsewhereness is the re-invention of place where the sources of meaning, essence of place, and/or specific reference to actual location are fictionalized or modified through a lens of artificiality or inauthenticity. In essence, it is the process of making 'some place' some 'other place.' Within the context of literary tourism, it is the traveling to a location to "experience the history and culture" of that location as depicted in literary works (Fawcett and Cormack 2001, 687). It is the process of looking for the inauthentic (the literary world) within the authentic (reality). For the purposes of brevity and space limitations, authenticity and the inauthentic will be treated as noted above, with the researchers' cognizance of the social and value laden nature of authenticity. For a more complete treatment of authenticity as implied herein, please see Trilling (1972), Cohen (1979) and Redfoot (1984).

This transformation of space and place "in relation to its opposite" (Urry 1990, 1) has been a prominent theme within the literary tourism literature with respect to the authentic/inauthentic dichotomy (Cohen 1988; Hughes 1995; MacCannell 1973; Moscadero and Pearce 1981; Pearce and Moscadero 1986; Redfoot 1984; Squire 1994). As Hughes notes, the literary tourist makes representations about space based on the literary record. The more detailed the description of the location, the more 'framed' (Hughes 1995) the touristic experience – the greater the expectation that the authentic will represent the literary (inauthentic). Within the context of Laurence's Manawaka series and the actual town of Neepawa there is a complex interplay between the inauthentic and the authentic. The interplay manifests itself in Neepawa where the literary tourism of the town is based on "the intersection of [Laurence] (biographical facts and real places associated with the author) and fiction (settings and characters [of her books])" (Fawcett and Cormack 2001, 687). This complexity arises from the fact that it was through Laurence's detailed understanding of place based on her 'insideness' that she was able to provide such a detailed fictional town-space that the degree of spatial similarity between the authentic (reality) and the 'elsewhere' (literary) is noteworthy, as this paper will show.

Figure 1: *Mountain Ave., Neepawa (River Street, Manawaka), 1906.*

To explore more fully how Laurence's 'insideness' of the place she understood as the Neepawa of her childhood permeated the 'elsewhereness' of the fictional town of Manawaka, let us begin by developing a shared understanding of 'place' and 'insideness' in order to better identify how fictional space is modifying actual space on the Manitoba Prairie.

The Essence of Place

Places are those constructs of both human and natural orders that are the centres of our existence. Place is not concerned with the geographic location of activity (a grassy field, a city, a fictional landscape – these are the purview of 'space'), but rather place is intent on the experience and meaning of a particular setting. Place has as its basic constructs the objects of space as they are experienced, imbued with meaning, and rooted in activities centred about those experiences and meanings (Tuan 1974). Places are "sources of individual and communal identity, and are often profound centres of human existence to which people have deep emotional and psychological ties" (Relph 1976, 141).

Those deep emotional and psychological ties instil place with the memories of the meaningful events, experiences, and ongoing actions of our existence. As Relph indicates, without 'place,' our lives are devoid of meaning in the world, for "a deep relationship with place is as necessary, and perhaps as unavoidable, as close relationships with people; without such relationships human existence, while possible, is bereft of much of its significance" (Relph 1976, 41). The significance to which Relph refers is the broader understanding of our identity - our awareness and

consciousness of place is a vital source of both individual and cultural identity and security, a point of understanding from which we orient ourselves in the world.

Place is that memory laden centre of our lives where we develop our sense of being and understanding of the unfolding of life events, grounded against the meanings such events hold for our lives, contextualized by the memories (events, experiences, and their emotional attachments) developed from our place in the world.

Insideness and Outsideness

One of the constructs used to better understand and develop the notion of place is insideness. Insideness, or being inside, is fundamental to the place concept, such that "to be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it" (Relph 1976, 49). Such identification is paramount to place, for our identification with a place is more than just the site and situation of a setting, but more importantly it is the entirety of the experience at that setting that gives it meaning, and such meaning becomes part of our memory to identify like places. Insideness is that deep level of understanding about a place that can only be developed through experiences at that place. The more profoundly inside one is, the stronger one's identity with the place (Relph 1976).

Insideness is developed through the collection of life experiences, where those experiences are contextualized at the individual/personal level. Insideness provides one the ability to place the significance of events in life into the context of time and space. Insideness is that degree of understanding about a place that can only be realized through direct experiential contact and embeddedness of a person in that place.

Outsideness is the opposite construct in this dualistic expression of place and personal identity with space. If one is not inside, by definition, one must be outside. Insideness is an intimate knowledge of place based on the existential phenomena associated with the places, while outsideness is a passivity of experiential connectedness to place. Outsideness to place (therefore, location or space) is as if one is looking at a setting without feeling, meaning, or the ability to truly understand the context of the activities occurring at that location. It is a disconnectedness with the events of the location, and a lack of experiences (memories/local knowledge) in order to contextualize and 'place' that event that gives rise to being 'outside.' Insideness versus outsideness is akin to being an active participant versus being a passive spectator.

Various Degrees of Insideness

As readers of the lives and events that Laurence has created in the town of Manawaka, we experience what is termed 'vicarious insideness' (Relph 1976) – that degree of understanding about a location that gives the reader a sense of what it is like to live at that place. It is the intent of literary writers/authors to provide as detailed a vicarious experience of the place as possible in order for the reader to identify with the characters and to be able to relate "the depiction of a specific place…with our experiences of familiar places" (Relph 1976, 53). It is through this engagement that the reader develops a sense of deeply felt emotional attachment and involvement to the location as it is being described, to the extent that the elements of space and context provide a degree of 'place' for the reader within the context of the literary world.

The extension of vicarious insideness, carried to the next echelon of attachment to 'place,' is 'empathic insideness.' This degree of insideness,

> demands a willingness to be open to significances of a place, to feel it, to know and respect its symbols….To be inside a place empathically is to understand that place as rich in meaning, and hence to identify with it, for those meanings are not only linked to the experiences and symbols of those whose place it is, but also stem from one's own experiences. (Relph 1976, 54-55)

Laurence's works provide readers with the vicarious insideness of her knowledge of the 'place' she understood as the Neepawa of her youth, placed into the context of a lifetime of experiences. It is that lifetime of experiences, both Laurence's and the reader's, that offers a connection with the author's work that transcends mere words and becomes a deeper, richer experience where the essence of 'place' becomes part of the cultural and place-based Canadian Prairie identity.

A Few Questions

Some questions thus arise from the constructs above: Has Margaret Laurence created a true 'elsewhereness' in the fictional town of Manawaka? Further, is it only through the skilful wordsmithing of the author that we develop a sense of 'place' that we, as readers, have been known to associate with the actual town of Neepawa; or has Laurence's understanding of the place and her insideness to Neepawa simply been reconstructed and documented as part of the Prairie literary record under a new/fictional place-name?

Methodology

Throughout the Manawaka series, there are references to places, both proximate and immediate, that when taken in the context of all five books of the series, allow the reader to develop a detailed understanding of the site and situation of the fictional town of Manawaka. The extent to which Manawaka can be 'placed' and situated 'inside' Neepawa can be observed through literary place reconstruction - the ability to accurately recreate space created in prose due to sufficiently detailed descriptions of the location (Pocock 1982; Ferguson 2002). Key to employing literary place reconstruction is, as a reader, to experience the text (a vicariously inside experience) in order to develop a 'sense of place' with the fictional location such that the broader understanding of the locations within all the texts, when taken into collective consideration, allow one to recreate (map) that space as if one had lived, as a member of the community (empathic insideness), in the fictional town of Manawaka.

To reconstruct the literary world of Manawaka, each of the books of the series needed to be considered. The process of literary place reconstruction itself is rather elementary – record each place or locational reference in the text(s), and then site those places/locations, *vis-à-vis* their situation, in the context of the fictional town. Once mapped (which is the second phase of the methodology – that of cognitive mapping), the degree of similarity between the maps (reality vs. literary) is evaluated. Typically, cognitive maps are drawn by various readers, and their degree of similarity is assessed. In this instance, since fictional Manawaka is believed to be the actual town of Neepawa, the cognitive map was compared to the actual locations of places in Neepawa.

In order to reduce bias in the interpretation of literary versus actual space, all locational references were recorded by one researcher and those locational cues provided to the other researcher for the cognitive mapping exercise to be conducted without having first visited the town of Neepawa. Once the cognitive map was completed, only then was a street level base map of the town of Neepawa consulted in order to site the places of fictional space relative to actual space – if in fact Neepawa was the construct for Manawaka.

The Findings

Beginning with a street level base map of Neepawa, it was evident that some literary license was taken by Laurence with respect to street names. After correcting for her differing street names (only two corrections

were required for the two major arteries running through Neepawa – Mountain Avenue was called River Street in the texts, and Hamilton Street was known as Main Street) all the reconstructed sites fell readily into place. Laurence's attention to detail and the extent to which she described the site and situation of the buildings and landmarks within her fictional world were so specific (when placed within the context of all five books of the series) that the similarity between the locations (Manawaka and Neepawa) is exceptionally noteworthy. Using the 31 specific references made to locations in the 5 books of the Manawaka series, those same locations were sought in Neepawa. If the elsewhereness of the literary world (Manawaka) was grounded in the actual location of Laurence's youth (Neepawa), there would be a high degree of correlation between the maps of these two realms. Table 1 indicates the degree of similarity between fictional and actual space.

Table 1 indicates a high level of correspondence between the settings, to the extent that virtually every locational reference in Manawaka (fictional space) can be linked with an actual location in Neepawa (actual space). Had Laurence simply attempted to construct a generic Prairie town, one with quintessentially Prairie characteristics, the elsewhereness of such a place should have *some* degree of similarity to Neepawa, but for there to be such a high degree of spatial similarity from the fictional world to the real world leaves little room for misinterpretation – Manawaka and Neepawa, Manitoba are one and the same place.

If these two worlds have indeed collided, and their spaces are being shared in the same location, then the cognitive map of Manawaka should serve as a map for Neepawa. To test this statement, a driving tour of Neepawa was conducted using the cognitive map of Manawaka, recording the similarity of locations (as described through the series) photographically and cartographically. Once again, correcting for literary license with the street names (Mountain Ave vs. River St., and Hamilton St. vs. Main St.), every location from the series was referenced back to a location in actual space. Those locations as defined by the cognitive map of Manawaka are identified by the push-pin symbols on Map 1. The map details the sites of locations in Neepawa that match the sites of locations in Manawaka – those sites including identically titled businesses, house names, important buildings, and places identified by the Margaret Laurence Museum as 'important places' to Laurence, her readers, or those on literary tours (see Figures 2, 3 and 4). (As an anecdotal aside, this referential tour spanned a total of 3 ½ hours, both driving and walking about the town of Neepawa, where on more than one occasion the researchers caught themselves referring to places, street names, and businesses not by their names as they appeared before them, but by their names as known in the Manawaka

Table 1: *Manawaka locations versus Neepawa locations.*

| Manawaka Locations	Neepawa Locations	Book References*
Near Winnipeg	Near Winnipeg	SA, JG, FD,BH, D
Diamond Lake	Clear Lake	FD, BH, D
Galloping Mountain	Riding Mountain	SA, JG, BH, D
RCAF Base	Flight School	FD, BH, D
Wachakwa River	Whitemud River	SA, JG, FD,BH, D
Grain Elevators	Grain Elevators	BH, D
Train Station	Beautiful Plains Museum	SA, FD, BH, D
Manawaka Creamery	Neepawa Creamery	SA
Shacks/Shanties	Small houses near tracks	SA, JG, FD,BH, D
The Dump/Nuisance Grounds	Composting Site	SA, D
Cemetery	1 Smith Drive (Cemetery)	SA, JG, BH, D
Stone Angel	Davidson Memorial	SA
Peonies, Crocuses on Graves	Petunias on Graves	SA, JG, D
Grandfather's House	312 First Ave.	BH
Presbyterian Church	Knox Presbyterian	SA
MacLeod Residence	483 Second Ave.	BH
Public School	Former location of School	SA, JG, FD,BH, D
Christie & Prin's House	265 Vivian St.	D
Cameron's/Japonica Funeral Parlor	580 First Ave.	SA, JG, FD,BH, D
Regal Café	Lee's Restaurant	JG, BH, D
Queen Victoria Hotel	King Edward Hotel	SA, JG, BH
Simlow's Ladies Wear	Myra's Ladies/Men's Wear	SA, JG, BH, D
Bank of Montreal	Bank of Montreal	SA, JG, BH
United Church	United Church	SA, JG, BH, D
Anglican Church	Anglican Church	SA
Manawaka Hospital	Neepawa Health Centre	SA, JG, FD,BH, D
Roxy	Roxy Theater	JG
Court House	County Court Building	BH, D
MacLeod & Cameron Cottages	Family Cottage	BH, FD
Manawaka Banner	Neepawa Press	SA, FD, D
Granite Works	Guinn Bros	D

* *WHERE:*
SA = The Stone Angel, JG = A Jest of God, FD = The Fire Dwellers
BH = A Bird in the House, D = The Diviners

series. Even here, care had to be taken to refer to the factual and fictional places carefully.)

Given the exceptionally high level of correspondence between the settings, the elsewhereness of the fictional space Lawrence attempted to create has been replaced with her insideness of place, based on actual location. Laurence's insideness (her understanding) of Neepawa provided the only Prairie context from which she could write about such places. The highly emotionally charged and memory-laden 'place' of her youth became the point for all spatial and locational references to what she deemed as Prairie.
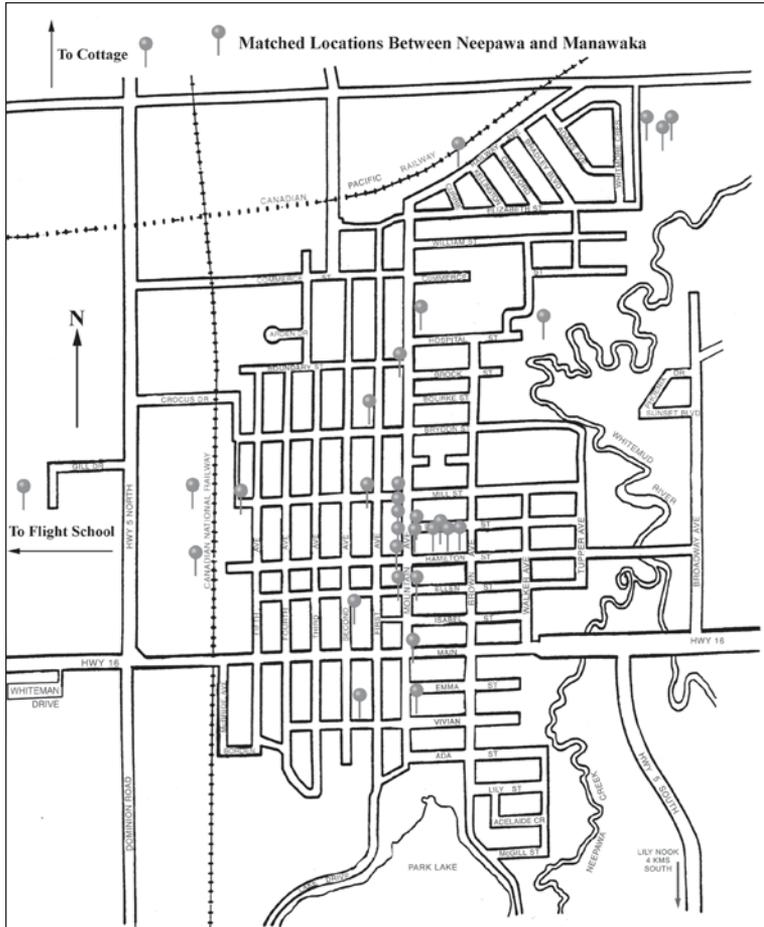
Map 1: *Cognitive Map of Manawaka Cross-referencing Sites from Table 1*

As one of the most detailed and extensively developed literary place constructions of the Prairie, it is Laurence's very insideness to the place that allows the reader to vicariously experience Prairie life - at least as Laurence defined it. Her perspective, accurate or otherwise, has defined and documented a collage of Prairie existence that is now part of the Canadian, and Prairie, literary record. That record of Prairie living as seen through Laurence's eyes and characterized through the town of Manawaka, has come to be understood as Neepawa, Manitoba, as the literary place reconstruction readily attests.

Figure 2: *312 First Ave. – Grandfather's House.*

Figure 3: *580 First Ave. – Japonica Funeral Parlor.*

Figure 4: *The Stone Angel – The Davidson Memorial.*

For those individuals who, after reading the series, have developed a sense of empathic insideness – that deep degree of connection with the characters and places developed in fiction – and feel the need to experience the 'place' of Manawaka as Laurence has developed it through her experiences and her life in Neepawa, they rely on literary tourism to more fully develop their empathic and vicarious insideness (BTA 1983; Curtis 1985; Pocock 1987; Squire 1988; Squire 1992). Literary tourism is that experience whereby visitors attempt to connect with the cultural heritage of the author through guided or self-guided tours of places of importance to the author. Typically, these places of importance are buildings, streetscapes, or a childhood home. These tours have an interesting effect on 'place'; as Urry (1990) indicates, the literary tourist, instead of seeking actual sites, looks for 'the opposite' on these tours, attempting to find identifiers, traits or characteristics depicted in the 'elsewhereness' of the literature.

Extending Urry's (1990) and Hughes' (1995) constructs into a spatial application of the authentic/inauthentic duality of literary tourism, a

question comes to the fore: Does literary tourism in the Town of Neepawa take an authentic location and, through the eyes of the tourist, render it Manawaka (inauthentic) as tourists seek to find visual cues from Laurence's works? In other words, does literary tourism, then, take 'elsewhere' and make that place 'here,' and if so, what does that do to the identity of the place?

Spatial Identity Implications for the Town of Neepawa

Irrespective of the degree to which the literary tourist believes his or her 'insideness' extends into the community of Neepawa/Manawaka, that insideness fails to fully capture the insideness to which Margaret Laurence developed her sense of place in this Prairie town. These empathic/vicarious insiders re-live Laurence's fictional and factual worlds, her life, and her works, but may never perceive them in *exactly* the same way as Laurence sensed her place in this Prairie landscape. The result is one of 'outsideness' for the literary tourist, for no two people can perceive space in *exactly* the same manner (Tuan 1974).

The tourist, however, has commodified the fictional world of Manawaka in the attempt to see elements of that fictional elsewhereness in the (f)actual town of Neepawa. Imparting such elsewhereness upon actual space fails to capture Laurence's insideness of Neepawa. The very process of commodification of place changes the essence of that place, replacing the insideness that imbued the site with such strong symbolism and character as found in the literary record of Laurence's Manawaka with 'outsideness'. In the case of Neepawa, Manitoba, the 'outsideness' is expressed subtly through elements of the elsewhereness of Manawaka permeating, encroaching upon and imbuing its sense of place and its inauthenticity on the actual Town of Neepawa. This 'emergent authenticity' (Cohen 1988) has resulted in the 'real' being substituted with the inauthentic and fictional. For example, the local art gallery bears the title Manawaka Gallery, even though the community is not called Manawaka (see Figure 5); the Margaret Laurence museum is part of her childhood home, but the museum office (at the back of the house) has been completely remodeled and does not represent the original kitchen and back-room of the house Laurence once knew; and the United church, which was so important to Lawrence, was completely rebuilt after a fire rendering that site no longer an authentic link to Lawrence's Neepawa/Manawaka. The result is an "inauthenticity" of the very environment the 'outsiders' are there to see and experience as literary tourists.

Figure 5: *Manawaka superimposing itself upon Neepawa.*

Conclusion

The 'quintessential Prairie town' as understood and depicted through Margaret Laurence's insideness and sense of place with the Neepawa of her childhood is changing to reflect the elsewhereness of the fictional space she has created. The literary record that Laurence created through inauthentic Manawaka has taken on qualities of what Cohen (1988) termed 'emergent authenticity' as Neepawa's townscape is transforming to explicitly exhibit traits of Manawaka for the literary tourist, as Figure 5 attests.

The findings indicate that of the 31 identified place locations from the Manawaka series, all 31 sites could be situated within Neepawa and its surrounding area through literary place reconstruction and cognitive mapping. This degree of correspondence between the authentic and the inauthentic can readily lead to a misinterpretation of Laurence's intent to create a quintessential Prairie town for all her readers to understand Prairie life. As more of the artificiality of Manawaka emerges into Neepawa, the commodification of the town serves to promote literary tourism based on Laurence's works and her life. The record of Prairie life she attempted to preserve in such socio-cultural and spatial detail is forever being changed from the authentic to the inauthentic.

Laurence's deep understanding of 'place' and her 'insideness' to that place are not fully captured by literary tourists, irrespective of how deep their sense of connection to her works (Redfoot 1984; Tuan 1974). The lens of artificiality through which the readers of the Manawaka series vicariously and/or empathically experience Laurence's interpretation of life in the Prairie town of Neepawa, Manitoba, is acting both as an optic to let 'outsiders' 'into' Laurence's 'place,' and as an instrument that is now letting her world 'out', transforming it, and rendering it inauthentic.

References

BRITISH TOURIST AUTHORITY 1983 in *Britain: Literary Heritage* (London: British Tourist Authority)

COHEN, E. 1979 'A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences' *Sociology* 13, 179-201

COHEN, E. 1988 'Authenticity and Commodification in Tourism' *Annals of Tourism Research* 15:2, 371-386

CURTIS, J. 1985 'The most famous fence in the world: Fact and Fiction in Mark Twain's Hannibal' *Landscape* 28, 4-14

FAWCETT, C. and CORMACK, P. 2001 'Guarding Authenticity at Literary Tourism Sites' *Annals of Tourism Research* 28:3, 686-704

FERGUSON, M. 2002 'Cognitive Approaches to Figurative Language' *Style*, 36, 3

HUGHES, G. 1995 'Authenticity in Tourism' *Annals of Tourism Research*, 22:3, 781-803

LAURENCE, M. 1964 *The Stone Angel* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart)

LAURENCE, M. 1966 *A Jest of God* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart)

LAURENCE, M. 1969 *The Fire-Dwellers* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart)

LAURENCE, M. 1970 *A Bird in the House* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart)

LAURENCE, M. 1974 *The Diviners* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart)

MACCANNELL, D. 1973 'Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings' *American Journal of Sociology* 79, 589-603

MOSCADERO, G. and PEARCE, P. 1981 'Historic Theme Parks: An Australian Experience in Authenticity' *Annals of Tourism Research* 13, 467-479

PAYNE, S. 1998 *Literary Tourism: An examination of tourists' anticipation of and encounter with the Literary Shrine of Willa Cather and Margaret Laurence* (unpublished Ph.D thesis, York University)

PAYNE, S. 2001 'Neepawa's Heritage Tourism: Margaret Laurence's Literary Legacy' *Prairie Perspectives: Geographical Essays* 4, 162-171

PEARCE, P. and MOSCADERO, G. 1986 'The Concept of Authenticity in Tourist Experiences' *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 22, 121-132

POCOCK, D. 1982 'Writers who know their places' *Geographical Magazine* 54, 40-43

POCOCK, D. 1987 'Howorth: the experience of literary place' in W. Mallory, P. Simpson-Housley, eds. *Geography and Literature: a meeting of the disciplines* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press) 135-142

REDFOOT, D. 1984 'Touristic Authenticity, Touristic Angst, and Modern Reality' *Qualitative Sociology* 7:4, 291-309

RELPH, E. 1976 *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Limited)

SQUIRE, S. 1988 'Wordsworth and Lake District tourism: Romantic reshaping of landscape' *Canadian Geographer/Le Géographie canadien* 32, 237-247

SQUIRE, S. 1992 'Ways of seeing, ways of being: Literature, place and tourism in L.M. Montgomery's Prince Edward Island' in P. Simpson-Housley, G. Norcilffe, eds. *A Few Acres of Snow* (Toronto: Dundurn Press) 137-147

SQUIRE, S. 1994 'The Cultural Values of Literary Tourism' *Annals of Tourism Research* 21:1, 103-120

THOMAS, C. 1975 *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart)

TRILLING, L. 1972 *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London: Oxford University Press)

TUAN, Y.-F. 1961 'Topophilia, or sudden encounter with landscape' *Landscape* 11, 28-32

TUAN, Y.-F. 1974 *Topophilia: a study of environmental perception, attitudes and values* (Englewood, Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall)

URRY, J. 1990 *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage)