

L.M. Montgomery and the Changing Times

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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that these changes can be seen, as so many clerical leaders at the time saw them, as an attenuation of the original puritan social order and can be represented as a decline from the radically traditional world envisioned and, to a remarkable degree, actually achieved, by the founding generations of orthodox puritans, the declension model can still plausibly be used as a framework for describing the social history of colonial New England. The process of social change in New England during the century after 1660, however, involved considerable demographic and economic growth as well as social elaboration, stratification, and consolidation, and such trends can be at best only partially and inaccurately comprehended within a declension model.

JACK P. GREENE

L.M. Montgomery and the Changing Times

LUCY MAUD MONTGOMERY MAY NEVER BE hot property in academic circles, but new books and articles suggest that her prolific pen is finally receiving serious attention from critics. As more and more of Montgomery's writing is published and republished, critics and fans are reassessing her as letter writer, journal writer, autobiographer, poet, short story writer, and novelist. Partly because of the new materials, and partly because of Montgomery's continuing popularity, more critics are showing interest in the quality of Montgomery's creations as well as in Montgomery herself as a successful writer whose artistic choices deserve study within their personal and historical contexts.

The number of Montgomery fans has continued to grow in the 80 years since the publication of *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), but the critical reception of Montgomery and her works has always been, at best, mixed. Desmond Pacey, in *Creative Writing in Canada* (Toronto, Ryerson, 1952), identified Montgomery as one of the writers of the Canadian "age of brass" (p. 82), and then dismissed her and her most enduringly popular work in these now famous words: "*Anne of Green Gables* is a children's classic, and it would be silly to apply adult critical standards to it.... It had all the features of the kind of escape literature which a materialistic and vulgar generation craved..." (p. 98). Archibald MacMechan, Montgomery's own literature professor at Dalhousie, gave his verdict on *Anne of Green Gables* in *Headwaters of Canadian Literature* (Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1924): "The Canadian book just misses the kind of success which convinces the critic while it captivates the unreflecting general reader" (p. 211). More recently, Sheila Egoff, in her important study *The Republic of Childhood* (2nd ed.; Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1975), has offered this irritated comment on *Anne*: "To denigrate the literary qualities of *Anne of Green Gables* is as useless an exercise as carping about the architecture of the National War

Memorial. Anne arrived and she has stayed" (p. 304). It is comments such as Pacey's and Egoff's that T.D. MacLulich has in mind when he declares in a survey of the history of Montgomery's critical reception: "Some critics grow visibly exasperated when they are forced to deal with Montgomery's work. Their patronizing comments make it plain that they see Montgomery as a writer of sentimental fiction who once had the luck to stumble on a formula that touched a universal nerve".¹ Perhaps this exasperation accounts for Montgomery's absence from Douglas Daymond's and Leslie Monkman's two-volume anthology *Literature in Canada* (Toronto, Gage Educational Publishing Limited, 1978); it begins with Jacques Cartier and has selections in its first volume from, among others, Duncan, Scott, Lampman, McClung, and Leacock, but it makes no mention of Montgomery.

The overwhelming popularity of Montgomery's works has never been easy to dismiss, even if it has been irritating or embarrassing. When MacMechan says that *Anne* just misses being a masterpiece, he also goes on to comment on the culture that prefers her writing: "The conclusion to be drawn from Miss Montgomery's achievement is that the great reading public on this continent and the British Isles has a great tenderness for children, for decent, and amusing stories, and a great indifference towards the rulings of the critics" (p. 212). In *Canadian Writers* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1951) Arthur Phelps has more difficulty accounting for Montgomery's popularity and acknowledging his own admiration for her work. His chapter on Montgomery, in fact, is really a whimsical apology for his own inability to dismiss what his strict literary judgment tells him is popular and inferior. He begins the discussion with a delightful self-irony that has probably given others the courage to champion Montgomery in the face of a stern academy: "By the standards of discriminating literary criticism none of these writers [Service, de la Roche, Connor, Montgomery] is important. No critic would think of any one of them as having made a serious contribution to literature. Yet these writers have carried the name of Canada here and there throughout the English-speaking world, and, in some cases, through translation, much beyond the English-speaking world. Now how shall one interpret this phenomenon? Some Canadians hang their heads in shame" (p. 85). What follows is a discussion of Montgomery's successful, almost irresistible creation of innocence, and the chapter ends with Phelps's embarrassed, self-ironic, but nevertheless sincere summary and challenge: "In these days such a service [the creation of believable innocence] may not be negligible. Just for fun, if you can, get a copy of *Anne of Green Gables* by L.M. Montgomery and read it" (p. 93).

This whole question of popularity has bothered critics since the discussion of Montgomery's work began. Many authors, in both the first and second editions of

1 T.D. MacLulich, "L.M. Montgomery's Portraits of the Artist; Realism, Idealism, and the Romantic Imagination", *English Studies in Canada*, XI (December 1985), p. 459.

Carl F. Klinck, ed., *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1965, 1976) simply lump Montgomery together with other prolific and popular regional writers and local colorists such as Ralph Connor and Nellie McClung without discussing the reasons for Montgomery's persistent, even growing popularity, as opposed to the relative decline in popularity of the other writers' works. Others insist that this enduring popularity is rooted in the quality of Montgomery's vision and writing, and must be examined fairly and thoroughly because the writing has reached and continued to reach so many different kinds of readers. Shortly after Montgomery's death, her 40-year pen-pal, Ephraim Weber, wrote an article entitled "L.M. Montgomery's 'Anne'" for the *Dalhousie Review*. In it Weber posed the question that he intended to be rhetorical, but which continues, in fact, to be behind both the dismissals and the appreciations of Montgomery's work: "Can so many people of so many kinds in so many lands be charmed by *cheap* fiction with its anaemic reality?"²

One of the most important and useful recent publications on Montgomery has been in response to this very question of persistence of popularity. In the introduction to *Lucy Maud Montgomery: A Preliminary Bibliography* (Waterloo, University of Waterloo Library, 1986) the editors, Ruth Russell, D.W. Russell, and Rea Wilmshurst, note that there have been many reasons for the critical denigration of Montgomery's work: she was popular, Canadian, a woman, an acknowledged author of children's fiction, a "writer of best-sellers and then pot-boilers and many variations on a tried-and-true theme to reach an eager, ready-made audience" (p. xviii). They remark that the recent serious study of her novels suggests that the "tide of disfavour" is changing, but they note that "there is still a massive reversal that must take place before this writer receives the attention she is due — due not because she is Canadian, or a woman, or has been neglected, but because her books have spoken so directly to so many millions of young adolescent girls (and boys) and continue to do so today, seventy-five years later and in the disparate cultures of Japan, Korea, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Argentina. There are qualities in her books that touch the deepest places in the heart of childhood" (p. xix).

The bibliography (necessarily "preliminary" because many of Montgomery's papers and records are sealed until 1992 at Guelph) offers an invaluable record of the criticism of Montgomery in addition to listing adaptations made of her works for other media, anthologized works, and archival holdings. A carefully assembled list of Montgomery's hundreds of poems and short stories (compiled by Rea Wilmshurst from Montgomery's scrapbooks in the New London birthplace) will astound most readers. Most of the stories and poems have never been reprinted since their first appearance in journals; some of the stories and poems listed here have never been printed. The bibliography will be essential to

2 *Dalhousie Review*, 24 (April 1944), p. 68.

scholars interested in the extent of Montgomery's writing and the limited critical response to it, and to devoted readers who will hope for new collections.

Despite Montgomery's popularity and prolificness, there are only a small number of critical works and biographies on her, though the spate of recent serious articles suggests that the trend is changing. In fact, the most important recent book-length publications in the Montgomery field, apart from the bibliography, have been by Montgomery herself rather than by her explainers. In *My Dear Mr. M.: Letters to G.B. MacMillan* (Toronto, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1980) F.W.P. Bolger and Elizabeth R. Epperly selected and edited letters Montgomery wrote over 39 years to an aspiring author in Scotland named George Boyd MacMillan. The letters to MacMillan, like the letters to Ephraim Weber, a small selection of which was published by Wilfred Eggleston as *The Green Gables Letters* (Toronto, Ryerson, 1960), show Montgomery as a charming literary conversationalist. She shares with MacMillan a homey love of gardening and cats but she also speculates freely here — as she did not do in her fiction — on such subjects as reincarnation, the divinity of Christ, and trends in contemporary writing. In reviewing the volume, Muriel Whitaker suggested that the significance of the letters is found in their substance and their style; Montgomery should be considered seriously as an accomplished letter writer as well as a writer of fiction.³

The publication of the first volume of the *Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery, 1889-1910* (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1985) marks Montgomery as a compelling writer in yet another genre. Professors Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston produced a superbly edited volume (the first of five) that will be invaluable for critics and fans alike and has already proved itself another Montgomery high seller. The Montgomery revealed here is very different from the conversationalist found in the letters even though she did often copy from her journal to catch up both MacMillan and Weber on recent events in her life. The Montgomery of this first Oxford volume has two personalities, one bright and fun-loving, the other gloomy, depressed, prostrated by unnamed and (to us) unidentifiable worries. (Some of the worries are later identified in the second Oxford volume.) Montgomery says herself in 1910, when looking back over the entries written between 1889 and 1910, that the first volume seems to have been written by a rather shallow and giddy girl and that the second (both of her original volumes are preserved together in the first Oxford volume) suggests a "morbid temperament" (p. xxi). She goes on to insist that neither Maud is the real one, and certainly a careful reading of the entries allows most readers to see far more than two personalities at play.

The second volume of *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery 1910-1921* (Toronto, Oxford University Press) was published in October 1987. This Maud Montgomery is a mature craftswoman who has found her voice and who writes

3 "Literary Pen-Pals", *Canadian Literature*, 90 (Autumn 1981), pp. 141-3.

with clarity and evenness whether she is ironic, cheerful, earnest, or despondent. Much of the narrative playfulness of the early journals has disappeared, and we find the thoughtful, vigorous, poignant confidences offered by the woman who has become a world-famous writer but who now also has to hide her real self from the petty Grundyism in her husband's rural Ontario parish. Maud Montgomery Macdonald speaks frankly to her journal about marriage, motherhood, religion, a lengthy lawsuit with the L.C. Page company of Boston, and her husband's near insanity. In vivid, passionate sentences she responds to the campaigns of World War I; she tries to "write out" the heart-break she suffers over the death of her favourite cousin. Despite the personal and professional hardships, Montgomery balances gloom and anguish with irony; the touch of the experienced writer is unmistakable in this second volume of the private journals.

The Maud Montgomery of the journals makes it very clear what personal sacrifices are involved in writing what the publishers and the public demand from her. It is this tough-minded and yet compromising woman who will become and has already become fascinating for those interested in the social and gender-related complexities of a female artist's career. In reviewing the first volume of the journals, Corall Ann Howells hits on one of the aspects of Montgomery studies that is bound to get more attention: "Though having no part in any women's movement, Montgomery unselfconsciously engages with the central issues of feminism through her sense of her own potential and her struggles to fulfill her creative ambition".⁴

As a journal writer, as well as letter writer, Montgomery is an intelligent, strong-minded individual who never tells all she thinks about any subject, but who nevertheless tells enough to allow us to speculate with some authority on her reasons for writing the way she did. We should keep in mind when reading the journals that Montgomery wanted them published, and edited them along the way, probably with that aim in view. This self-consciousness makes the reading even more interesting, for it is sometimes obvious (especially in the early journals) that Montgomery is deliberately entertaining an audience, even testing different voices and techniques, as much as she is revealing truths about herself.

In yet another genre, poetry, Montgomery has long been judged negatively by the one slim volume of collected verse entitled *The Watchman and Other Poems*, published in 1916. The volume has been deservedly ignored, though one critic has traced some of the poems' images in the prose of *Anne's House of Dreams*.⁵ According to two Canadian academics, John Ferns and Kevin McCabe, the choice of poems in the *Watchman* collection is injudicious and unrepresentative

4 "LMM: Finding a Voice", *Canadian Children's Literature*, 45 (1987), p. 81.

5 Elizabeth R. Epperly, "L.M. Montgomery's *Anne's House of Dreams*: Reworking Poetry", *Canadian Children's Literature*, 37 (1985), pp. 40-6.

of Montgomery's best work; they have prepared their own collection of 86 of the best poems from Montgomery's more than 500, and the *Poetry of L.M. Montgomery* appeared in the fall of 1987 (Markham, Ont., Fitzhenry & Whiteside).⁶ If their estimations of the verse are correct, detailed criticism of Montgomery's poetry will no doubt appear quickly.

As a short story writer Montgomery has also received little attention, even though we have four volumes of her stories, two published posthumously and two, *Chronicles of Avonlea* (1912) and (much to her horror and despite a lengthy lawsuit) *Further Chronicles of Avonlea* (1920), published in her lifetime. It is noteworthy that Mary Jane Edwards, Paul Denham, and George Parker included one of Montgomery's Avonlea stories in the second of their four-volume anthology *The Evolution of Canadian Literature in English* (Toronto, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973). They offer this as part of their commentary on a Montgomery they clearly find important: "Thus, while her stories present a world that seems more idyllic than ours, there are enough misunderstandings, separations, and failures in them to suggest that their author was more realistic and sceptical in her attitudes about her world and the people in it than many of her critics generally acknowledge" (p. 315).

After Montgomery's death, her son, Dr. Stuart Macdonald, discovered among his mother's papers an unpublished collection of stories called "The Blythes are Quoted" and published it, somewhat edited, under the title *The Road to Yesterday* (Toronto, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1974). Five years later Catherine McLay brought together a collection of 14 stories, under the title of *The Doctor's Sweetheart and Other Stories* (Toronto, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1979), that Montgomery had herself published in magazines between 1899 and 1935. Neither of these collections has received much notice even though some of the stories of the first volume show more acerbity than Montgomery is usually credited with and some of the reprinted stories in the second collection offer insight into Montgomery's habit of re-using story material in novels. Other collections from the more than 500 stories Wilmshurst has found in the scrapbooks (and has listed in the *Preliminary Bibliography*) are sure to be put into collections soon. Rea Wilmshurst has herself written an article on one of the devices Montgomery repeats in several of these un(re)published stories.⁷

As a novelist Montgomery has, predictably, received the most critical attention in the past and recently. Yet while criticism of Montgomery as a letter or journal writer or as poet or short-story writer may be understandably slim, it is surprising to find how little serious criticism has actually been written on Montgomery as a novelist. Apart from a few master's theses and mention in

6 See John Ferns, "'Rainbow Dreams': The Poetry of Lucy Maud Montgomery", *Canadian Children's Literature*, 42 (1986), pp. 29-40; Kevin McCabe, "L.M. Montgomery: The Person and the Poet", *Canadian Children's Literature*, 38 (1985), pp. 68-80.

7 "Cooking with L.M. Montgomery", *Canadian Children's Literature*, 37 (1985), pp. 47-52.

surveys of Canadian fiction, Montgomery has received little serious lengthy treatment until recently. The one collection of essays devoted entirely to her work — a 1975 issue of *Canadian Children's Literature* reissued in book form under the editorship of John Robert Sorfleet as *L.M. Montgomery: An Assessment* (Guelph, Canadian Children's Press, 1976) — marked a breakthrough in Montgomery criticism. Since then it is no longer a rarity to find scholarly articles on Montgomery or to find that she is the subject of serious attention at international conferences. *Canadian Children's Literature* continues to dominate the field in the number of serious Montgomery articles (ten articles since 1983), but other scholarly journals are opening up.

Two of T.D. MacLulich's articles suggest the quality and direction of the criticism on Montgomery herself. In "Anne of Green Gables and the Regional Idyll", MacLulich challenges critics who have so long and so smugly (or uneasily) dismissed Montgomery as a writer of passing importance to Canadian literary history and to Canadian literature.⁸ The second, mentioned above, "L.M. Montgomery's Portraits of the Artist", explores the literary models available to an author of Montgomery's time and temperament. In neither article does MacLulich claim Montgomery is the greatest artist of Canadian fiction, but he gives her credit for her achievement and treats her seriously in terms of her own choices and philosophy. Similarly, studies on the Anne and Emily books (especially) assess Montgomery's sophistication as a novelist. For example, Catherine Sheldrick Ross's "Calling Back the Ghost of the Old-Time Heroine: Duncan, Montgomery, Atwood, Laurence, and Munro" shows Montgomery deliberately inverting the devices of romantic comedy to create the ironic patterns of romance and denials of romance in *Anne of Green Gables*.⁹ Many critics are turning to the Emily books; Judith Miller, for example, sees the series in terms of the Canadian woman writer's fictional re-creation of the pressures and choices involved in establishing a voice as an artist.¹⁰

This serious treatment of Montgomery is not entirely new, of course. Elizabeth Waterston was making claims for Montgomery's powers with myth and archetype back in her landmark chapter "Lucy Maud Montgomery: 1874-1942" in *The Clear Spirit: Twenty Canadian Women and their Times*, ed. by Mary Quayle Innis (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1966). But critical approval of Montgomery has been a long time in coming, and we sense this reluctance in the scarcity of biographies. Apart from a few chatty, pleasant pamphlets on Montgomery's life, and Montgomery's own autobiographical

8 *Dalhousie Review*, 63 (Autumn 1983), pp. 488-501.

9 *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 4 (1979), pp. 43-58. See also T.D. MacLulich, "L.M. Montgomery and the Literary Heroine: Jo, Rebecca, Anne, and Emily", *Canadian Children's Literature*, 37 (1985), pp. 5-17.

10 "Montgomery's Emily: Voices and Silences", *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 9 (1984), pp. 158-68. See also Thomas E. Tausky, "L.M. Montgomery and 'The Alpine Path, So Hard, So Steep'", *Canadian Children's Literature*, 30 (1983), pp. 5-20.

sketches published collectively under the title *The Alpine Path* (1917; rpt. Don Mills, Ont., Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1974), we find only three biographies: Hilda Ridley's short appreciation, *The story of L.M. Montgomery: Author of 'Anne of Green Gables'* (London, George G. Harrap, 1956), based on conversations with Montgomery's friends and inspired by an enthusiastic reading of the Montgomery novels; Francis W.P. Bolger's *The Years Before 'Anne'* (Charlottetown, The Prince Edward Island Heritage Foundation, 1974), which chronicles the early years of Montgomery's career, draws strongly from the unpublished letters of Montgomery to her friend Penzie Macneill, and reproduces some of Montgomery's early poems, essays, and stories; and finally Mollie Gillen's *The Wheel of Things* (Don Mills, Ont., Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1975), a delightfully readable though rather sketchy account of Montgomery's life, relying heavily on the letters to MacMillan (mentioned above) that Gillen herself discovered, and providing some shrewd though brief assessments of Montgomery's novels. A complete biography of Montgomery, one that can comment on all of the writing as well as incorporate the information in the yet unpublished journals together with the information available in the hundreds of pages of letters in the National Archives, will probably have to wait until well after 1992, when the Guelph material will be unsealed and the best poems and stories will probably be available to scholars and general readers.

While Montgomery continues to gain credibility with scholarly and critical audiences, her less critical fan club has thriven. The *Preliminary Bibliography* lists the many glossy magazine articles (aimed at fans) written about Montgomery and her Island. Paperback editions of almost all the novels are readily available, and there is a recent Canadian edition of *Anne* in French.¹¹ In addition to perennial popularity in North America, Britain, and Australia, Montgomery has achieved phenomenal popularity in Japan and Poland. Thousands of Japanese tourists rush to Prince Edward Island each summer just to experience the genuine flavour of the land of Green Gables. In commenting on the Japanese passion for Anne, Yuko Katsura says that critics may find *Anne* sentimental and the sequels to *Anne* dull, but the Japanese verdict is clear: "They don't care what critics may say or whether *Anne* has literary value. They like *Anne* and its sequels flaws and all".¹² Barbara Wachowicz offers a stirring testimony to Montgomery's power to touch the human spirit when she describes the overwhelmingly positive response in Poland to Montgomery's work. She gives details about past and recent reading surveys and she also talks about the successful musical stage version (which Wachowicz herself wrote) of Montgomery's adult novel *The Blue Castle*, first played in Cracow in 1982.¹³ As

11 *Anne...La Maison aux Pignons Verts*, trans. by Henri-Dominique (Charlottetown, Ragweed Press, 1986).

12 "Red-Haired Anne in Japan", *Canadian Children's Literature*, 34 (1984), p. 58.

13 "L.M. Montgomery: At Home in Poland", *Canadian Children's Literature*, 46 (1987), pp. 7-36.

Montgomery's international readership continues to grow with new translations, more critics will want to investigate the qualities in Montgomery's vision that evidently transcend barriers of time and culture.

Though Lucy Maud Montgomery may not become for scholars and critics the comfortable, solid industry she has clearly become for Prince Edward Island Tourism, she will gain more credibility and be given more generous (and meticulous) criticism as more and more is found out about her and as more of her writing is republished or published for the first time. And as she is discussed more openly and fairly, perhaps the new Montgomery critics will be able to ignore with impunity any residual disdain, irritation, embarrassment, or incredulity among their critical colleagues.

ELIZABETH R. EPPERLY

Back to the Bedside: Recent Work on the History of Medicine in Canada

FIVE YEARS AGO IN THIS JOURNAL Wendy Mitchinson offered a diagnosis of the existing body of work relating to medical history in Canada and concluded with a hopeful prognosis. Although the patient suffered somewhat from the rather Whiggish interventions of interested amateurs, a new generation of professional historians was on the scene to nurse the field from infancy to adolescence and to subsequent maturity. Armed with the scholarly insights and techniques of the new social history, and assisted by generous dollops of support from the Hannah Institute for the History of Medicine, this new generation has since set about to investigate medicine and health as it relates to questions of class, power, ideology, and social development. If at times this effort has been impeded by the desire of some people associated with the Hannah to make medical history a preserve of schools of medicine rather than of departments of history, a flurry of serious academic publications has nonetheless emerged during the past five years. No longer threatened by infant mortality, the field of medical history in Canada has reached a healthy adolescence.

The desire to understand health and medicine in its broader social context is evident in a number of recent studies which touch upon the history of specific diseases, the rise of hospitals and asylums, professionalization and the medical marketplace, the changing modalities of treatment and medical thought, the rise of the modern public health apparatus, and the coming of state medicine. Although many of these works give short shrift to the Maritimes, they contain much that will be of value to those interested in health, medicine, and social reform.

Jay Cassel's *The Secret Plague: Venereal Disease in Canada 1838-1939*