

# Under the Umbrella: The Author-Heroine's Love Triangle

---

• Dawn Sardella-Ayres •

**Résumé:** Selon Dawn Sardella-Ayres, le triangle amoureux de la trilogie *Émilie* de L.M. Montgomery reproduit, à des degrés divers, celui que l'on retrouve dans *Les Quatre Filles du docteur March*. Les deux héroïnes, Émilie et Jo, doivent choisir entre des hommes représentant l'ordre patriarcal et leurs amis d'enfance. La décision des personnages influence directement leur carrière littéraire. Puisque Louisa May Alcott et L.M. Montgomery ne pouvaient décrire la vie d'écrivaines vieilles filles, la trilogie modifie le choix de Jo et accorde à Émilie plus d'autonomie dans son mariage.

**Summary:** This paper suggests that the love triangle depicted in L.M. Montgomery's *Emily* trilogy duplicates, with different results, the one in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. Both Emily and Jo must choose between older patriarchal men and childhood boy-next-door friends, and their choices directly affect their writing careers. Because neither Alcott nor Montgomery could write of "literary spinsters," Montgomery's *Emily* trilogy rewrites Jo's marital choice and thus provides Emily with a more autonomous option in marriage.

...she found him more 'Jove-like' than ever, though his hatbrim was quite limp with the little rills trickling thence upon his shoulders (for he held the umbrella all over Jo)... The Professor looked as if he had conquered a kingdom... while Jo trudged beside him, feeling as if her place had always been there, and wondering how she ever could have chosen any other lot.

— Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (558-59)

Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868) and L.M. Montgomery's *Emily* trilogy (1923-1927) follow the pattern of *Künstlerroman* novels, taking the author-heroines from youth into adulthood — and marriage.<sup>1</sup> Emily's story, usually eclipsed in light of Montgomery's more famous Anne, begins in *Emily of New Moon* (1923), in which the ten-year-old orphan, an unconventional and imaginative child, comes to New Moon

Farm to live with her Aunts Elizabeth and Laura Murray after the death of her father. In this first book, Montgomery focuses on the heroine's developing connections with family, friends, and New Moon itself, as well as on her developing identity as a writer. The second book, *Emily Climbs* (1925), follows Emily from age fourteen to seventeen as she attends high school in Shrewsbury; the title refers to Emily's literary ambitions, specifically to her vow to "climb the Alpine Path" of fame,<sup>2</sup> and to her first successes as a writer. *Emily's Quest* (1927), the final book in the series, spans at least ten years' time and is the story of Emily's adult career as an ultimately successful writer, concluding with her seemingly conventional marriage to Teddy Kent.

Much scholarly attention has been devoted to the themes and issues in each novel as well as to the autobiographical links with their authors. T.D. MacLulich points out that the *Emily* series (as well as *Anne*) directly "descends from" *Little Women* as an example of "a particularly interesting character who was first introduced into children's fiction in Alcott's story, the aspiring young writer or literary heroine" (5). Meanwhile, E. Holly Pike notes the books' similarities in author-identity crises, specifically how "the career patterns of Emily and Jo at least roughly parallel the careers of the authors" (51), and suggests that the heroines' artistic careers in these novels "support...the domestic role of women" because they "are successful as writers only when they write for the family circle" (57). I suggest a stronger correlation between the two works and their main characters: namely, that with Emily and her two most serious suitors, Teddy Kent and Dean Priest, Montgomery duplicates Alcott's Jo/Laurie/Professor Bhaer love triangle, exploring alternative possibilities for a married woman as an independent artist.

Montgomery was quite familiar with Alcott's work;<sup>3</sup> she alludes to Jo's celebrated haircutting scene in *Anne of Green Gables*, and even paid a visit to Orchard House in Concord, MA, where Alcott wrote (*Selected Journals* II [29 Nov. 1910] 32). More significantly, Montgomery begins *Emily of New Moon* with the heroine reading John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*; in *Little Women*, Alcott not only draws from Bunyan's allegory in the book's plot structure and chapter titles, but the March girls also make consistent reference to this earlier text, calling it their "guidebook" (14) and mentioning how they "played pilgrims" as children. Even as young women, they "go on with it in earnest": Jo tells Laurie, "For the fun of it we bring our things in these bags, wear the old hats, use poles to climb the hill, and play pilgrims, as we used to do years ago. We call this hill the Delectable Mountain, for we can look far away and see the country where we hope to live some time" (165). Emily, after she moves to New Moon to live with her aunts, also names a nearby hill "The Delectable Mountain" (*Emily of New Moon* 184).

While not as hotly contested a union as that of Jo and Professor Bhaer,

Emily's marriage to Teddy Kent has displeased many critics. As with Jo, several critics perceive Emily to be undermined by the traditional institution of marriage. Mary Rubio, who calls the ending of *Emily's Quest* "a farce," adds that "Emily will of course have to find a man who can be her master; she will have to settle down to focusing on him and their marriage and not her own art. The happy ending will restore the social order where women and children are in their proper place...[and] Emily's creativity will be eclipsed in marriage" (28, 31). Marie Campbell sees Emily's marriage as the obliteration of Emily the artist: "[She] has been replaced by a bride, a wife-to-be...transform[ed] from a girl whose central endeavor is to nurture and promote her writing self, into a woman posed to embrace domesticity and the self-sacrifice of wifedom" (137-38).

Indeed, both Alcott and Montgomery complained about the seeming impersonal need to marry off their literary heroines to satisfy their readers and publishers. "Jo should have remained a literary spinster," Alcott wrote, but added that, because of public demand, "my little women must grow up & be married off in a very stupid style." She subverted this to an extent: "I won't marry Jo to Laurie to please any one.... [O]ut of perversity [I] went & made a funny match for her..." (*Life, Letters and Journals* 201). Montgomery likewise complained in her journal:

...the public and the publisher won't allow me to write of a young girl as she really is.... [W]hen you come to write of the 'miss' you have to depict a sweet, insipid young thing — really a child grown older — to whom the basic realities of life and reactions to them are quite unknown. *Love* must scarcely be hinted at — yet young girls in their early teens often have some very vivid love affairs. A girl of 'Emily's' type certainly would. But 'the public' — one of the Vanderbilts once said 'Damn the public.'

I'm just saying what one of the Vanderbilts said. I'm not saying it myself.

I can't afford to damn the public. I must cater to it for awhile yet. (*Selected Journals* III [20 Jan. 1924] 157)

Each heroine has only two serious romantic contenders. Jo is courted by her longtime friend Laurie and, later, by the much older Professor Bhaer, with whom she becomes acquainted while living in New York; likewise, Emily must choose between Dean Priest, an odd, literary, sophisticated former classmate of Emily's father, and Teddy Kent, an artist, the boy next door, and Emily's childhood friend.<sup>4</sup>

Teddy (which, notably, is also Jo's nickname for Laurie) and Laurie are both lonely neighbour boys who need nurturing and who become liberated by their friendships with Emily and Jo. Both Teddy and Laurie become worldly European travelers on one hand, and on the other, both are childhood companions and playfellows, signifying the familiar comforts of home. Both are seen as submissive men; Teddy Kent in particular is abu-

sively dominated by his mother and later, to an extent, by his erstwhile fiancée Ilse. Significantly, both Laurie and Teddy are artistic — Teddy paints and draws, Laurie plays and composes music — which puts them on egalitarian creative footing with their intended lovers, since both men understand artistic desires and demands. More importantly, the heroines are often in positions of creative superiority over each: Jo publishes stories before she gives up writing, but Laurie does not complete either requiem or opera; in one of her psychic episodes, Emily draws a picture of a house even though she presumably cannot draw, indicating that she has some access herself, even supernatural, to Teddy's mode of art. And it is often mentioned that Teddy "puts" something of Emily — her eyes, her smile — in his portraits, which Emily notices, not for the first time, in one of his illustrations for a magazine story: "I saw my own face looking out at me in the heroine. It always gives me a very ghostly sensation" (*Emily's Quest* 128). Later, Ilse writes Emily that Teddy's portrait *The Smiling Girl* is "you — Emily — it's you. Just that old sketch he made of you years ago completed and glorified.... What does it feel like, Emily, to realise yourself the inspiration of a genius?" (144). Thus, if Emily constantly informs Teddy's painting and artistic talents, this suggests that, in some respects, he is creatively limited whereas she is the freer and superior artist. In many considerable ways, these childhood friendships and these artistic commonalities influence in positive ways each heroine's writing career.

Laurie and Jo are both writers — he of music, she of stories — and they use each other as creative touchstones. When spinning their "castles in the air," Jo's and Laurie's goals are comparable: Laurie wants to travel and eventually to "be a famous musician myself, and all creation is to rush to hear me; and I'm never to be bothered about money or business, but just...live for what I like" (167). Jo wants her writing to be "as famous as Laurie's music.... I think I shall write books, and get rich and famous: that would suit me..." (168).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Laurie loves and accepts Jo before she is reduced to a "little woman." Tellingly, with Laurie and his college chums, Jo "found it very difficult to refrain from imitating the gentlemanly attitudes, phrases, and feats, which seemed more natural to her than the decorums prescribed for young ladies" (283). Laurie calls Jo "fellow" and "guy," implying that he accepts her whether or not her personality and traits are "little womanish," gives her an out-of-fashion floppy hat as a gift, is not at all scandalized by her "romping ways" that mess her pinned-up hair (180), and thinks her sloppy pinafore "peculiarly becoming" (289). Laurie's love is not conditional; he cares for her whether she is untidy or angry, as well as when she's "scribbling." Above all, he accepts Jo as an independent "woman of means" (281). Paradoxically, Jo refuses Laurie's marriage proposal because she says he would "hate [her] scribbling, and [she] couldn't get on without it" (430), yet a careful examination of the text shows no indication of this. Laurie is the only person who is completely

and wholly supportive of Jo's creative endeavours and who identifies her in crucially career-related terms. When Jo submits her first story to a newspaper, Laurie cries, "Hurrah for Miss March, the celebrated American authoress!" and tells her that "your stories are works of Shakespeare compared to half the rubbish that is published every day. Won't it be fun to see them in print, and shan't we feel proud of our authoress?" (178).

Similar to those of Jo and Laurie, Emily's and Teddy's individual artistic visions are linked in several significant ways. As mentioned earlier, Emily's features show up, apparently without Teddy's awareness, in every portrait he paints, even as a professional. As well, Teddy inspires Emily's seminal novel; after exchanging a look that makes Emily wonder apprehensively, "Am I falling in love with Teddy?" Teddy whimsically says:

'I've a pocket full of dreams to sell.... What d'ye lack? What d'ye lack? A dream of success — a dream of adventure — a dream of the sea — a dream of the woodland — any kind of a dream you want at reasonable prices, including one or two unique little nightmares. What will you give me for a dream?'

Emily turned around — stared at him for a moment — then forgot thrills and spells and everything else.... As if his question...had been a magic formula opening some sealed chamber in her brain, she saw unrolling before her a dazzling idea for a story — complete even to the title — *A Seller of Dreams*. For the rest of that night Emily thought of nothing else.... [S]he tingled from head to foot with the keen rapture of creation...intoxicated with immortal wine. (*Emily Climbs* 270-71)

Notably, Emily does not merely copy something of Teddy, as he does with her and *The Smiling Girl*. Teddy can only reproduce images of Emily and pass it off as genius and can only illustrate others' stories. Emily, though, creates the stories themselves.

Emily and Teddy also "call" to and "hear" each other in artistic ways. Importantly, two of Emily's four psychic reveries involve her "calling" to Teddy and him "hearing" her, the only communication Emily experiences while in this state. Even Teddy's whistle-signal to Emily signifies their artistic connection, not a demeaning summons.<sup>6</sup> Teddy's whistle — a manifestation of Emily's favourite poem by Tennyson, "The Bugle Song," and her favourite line in it, "the horns of Elfland faintly blowing" — sounds "like three clear bird notes...like the echoes in the *Bugle Song* that went clearer and further" (*Emily of New Moon* 143). It is, in part, the music of poetry that Emily responds to when she hears Teddy's whistle, and Teddy's call to her validates her love of it and her abilities to respond to it. (Later, Teddy gives Emily a copy of Tennyson's poems so she can learn "The Bugle Song" by heart.)

Teddy, as an artist, understands Emily's creative drives and her artistic temperament. They share similar "three-o'clock-in-the-morning" feelings

of despair and self-doubt in their abilities. As children, they make a compact to buy the Disappointed House, as Emily mentions in one of her journal-letters:

We decided that when we grew up we would...live here together. Teddy said he supposed we'd have to get married, but I thought maybe we could find a way to manage without going to all that bother. Teddy will paint pictures and I will write poetry and we will have toast and bacon and marmalade *every morning* for breakfast...and Teddy is always going to help me wash the dishes.... (*Emily of New Moon* 287)

Already, they have established a nontraditional alliance, and, in this unconventional support of each other, they are able to subvert some of the conventional pressures that derail Jo and Laurie.

Several Alcott scholars note that Laurie experiences gender restriction analogous to Jo's; Ken Parille notes that Laurie, like the March girls, is subject to the "struggle and ultimate submission to cultural expectations" (34). Laurie, at his grandfather's behest and, later, at Amy's, must put aside his musical aspirations in favour of fulfilling his expected societal roles of husband and breadwinner. Both Jo and Laurie must forsake their art — and their relationship, be it romantic or not — in favour of conventional marriage and paternal authority. Laurie, who once insisted he didn't "like fuss and feathers" (109), must marry a fashionable woman who calls him "my lord" (520), whereas Jo must marry an authority figure who is a "kindred spirit" to her own philosophical father.

While Jo works and writes in New York, Professor Bhaer, despite being "in no respect what is called fascinating...or brilliant" (412), acts as Jo's intellectual adviser. At a symposium one evening, Jo finds herself part of a spirited philosophical discussion:

...but a curious excitement, half pleasurable, half painful, came over her as she listened with a sense of being turned adrift into time and space, like a young balloon out on a holiday.

She looked round...and found [the Professor] looking at her with the grimmest expression she had ever seen him wear. He shook his head and beckoned her to come away, but she was fascinated just then by the freedom of Speculative Philosophy, and kept her seat.... He bore it as long as he could, but when he was appealed to for an opinion, he blazed up with honest indignation and defended religion.... Somehow, as he talked, the world got right again to Jo... [and she] felt as if she had solid ground under her feet again.... (415-16)

Professor Bhaer forbids her to take part in activities — be they theoretical lectures or sensational fiction — that engage her imagination and intellect in nontraditional ways. In this case, he literally grounds her, just as her father always has, keeping her firmly in the appropriate sphere of "little

womanhood."

Most importantly, though, Professor Bhaer becomes Jo's major literary critic. Despite her burgeoning career and financial success in New York, Jo is "beginning to feel" her writing is unfeminine and inappropriate (412), a concern her father has already expressed in his disapproval of Jo's sensation stories<sup>7</sup>— and, perhaps, of her ability to earn money by them: "You can do better than this, Jo. Aim at the highest and never mind the money" (316). However, once Professor Bhaer deems sensation fiction "harmful" and "not respectable," Jo's perspective is forever altered: "Being a little shortsighted, Mr. Bhaer sometimes used eyeglasses, and Jo had tried them once, smiling to see how they magnified the fine print of her book; now she seemed to have got on the Professor's mental or moral spectacles also, for the faults of these poor stories glared at her dreadfully and filled her with dismay" (419). Jo's reaction is extreme; she is deeply ashamed and burns all her stories because they "are trash, and will soon be worse than trash if I go on, for each is more sensational than the last... and what *should* I do if they were seen at home or Mr. Bhaer got hold of them?" (419-20). As made evident by her response, Professor Bhaer and Father are equivalent as Jo's moral arbiters and intellectual superiors.

After Jo returns from New York, and in a proposal scene strikingly similar to John Brooke's earlier appeal to Meg,<sup>8</sup> Laurie begs Jo to try to change her feelings and learn to love him. Jo responds, "I don't believe it's the right sort of love, and I'd rather not try it" (427). Significantly, she continues:

I agree with Mother that you and I are not suited to each other, because our quick tempers and strong wills would probably make us very miserable.... You'll get over this after a while, and find some lovely accomplished girl, who will adore you, and make a fine mistress for your fine house. I shouldn't. I'm homely and awkward and odd and old, and you'd be ashamed of me, and we should quarrel...and I shouldn't like elegant society and you would, and you'd hate my scribbling, and I couldn't get on without it.... I don't believe I shall ever marry. I'm happy as I am, and love my liberty too well to be in any hurry to give it up for any mortal man. (428-30)

An independent wife who "scribbles" would be an inelegant companion for a man of Laurie's social position; Laurie wouldn't hate Jo's scribbling, though society would. In refusing Laurie, Jo is acknowledging the contemporaneous standards — and her parents' training — that a man must be her superior, not her equal, and a wife cannot be an independent artist or "woman of means"; in so acknowledging she is on her way to becoming the ideal "little woman" that will later accept Professor Bhaer. Laurie anticipates this and, when Jo says she won't marry because she "loves her liberty," he responds, with a tragic face, "I know better!... You think so

now, but there'll come a time when you *will* care for somebody, and you'll love him tremendously, and live and die for him. I know you will, it's your way, and I shall have to stand by and see it" (430). Laurie recognizes the tragedy of Jo compromising her self for conventional love. Tellingly, Jo "loses patience" and answers "Yes, I *will* live and die for him, if he ever comes and *makes me love him in spite of myself*..." (430; latter emphasis mine).

Many critics note that Jo and Laurie are too evenly matched in temperament and ability. In "*Little Women: Alcott's Civil War*," Judith Fetterley argues that, "If anything, Laurie is Jo's inferior, as her constant reference to him as 'the dear boy' implies" (381). Christy Rishoi Minadeo continues the discussion, paraphrasing Fetterley: "not only are they too much alike, they're also too equal in age, intellect and personality. Laurie is more properly married to Amy who is immature enough and young enough to be his clear inferior" (209). Accordingly, Jo's reasons for refusing Laurie have to do with the cultural and societal expectations of marriage at the time and, especially, of her awareness of them. Jo has already felt threatened by the repressively patriarchal institution of marriage; for instance, when she suspects John Brooke is wooing Meg and that her parents have contrived at length to encourage the match, Jo responds with anger and frustration, slamming doors and stomping, and "was seen to shake her fist at Mr. Brooke's umbrella" (262). Later, Jo has "insult added to injury" when she discovers her "strong-minded sister enthroned upon [John Brooke's] knee and wearing an expression of the most abject submission" (271). For Jo, marriage equals unquestionable submission to a man who should become her superior (whether he actually is or not), and she has no examples of alternative relationships.

In spite of herself, Jo literally and figuratively marries her professor, a man as associated with education and authority as her father. For Jo, marriage to the "shortsighted" Professor Bhaer amounts to the termination of her writing;<sup>9</sup> unlike the popular movie versions based on the novel, Alcott does not portray Jo as a triumphant author before she accepts Professor Bhaer's marriage proposal; rather, Professor Bhaer comes to Jo after reading her sad, sentimental poem that defines her as a "woman in a lonely home" with "dreams of a future never found" (561-62). When newlyweds Amy and Laurie return from Europe, and all the extended family gather at the March house, Jo withdraws to the kitchen because "a sudden sense of loneliness came over her so strongly that she looked about her with dim eyes...for even Teddy had deserted her. If she had known what birthday gift was coming every minute nearer and nearer she would not have said to herself, 'I'll weep a little weep when I go to bed; it won't do to be dismal now'" (529). A sudden knock on the door interrupts Jo's tears and reveals her "birthday gift": Professor Bhaer, who has come from New York to court her because "she has a sorrow, she is lonely, she would find comfort in true love" (563). At the end of the novel, Jo is no longer either a writer or an

independent “woman of means.” Instead, she is literally ensconced under Professor Bhaer’s umbrella, whereas before she had violently shaken an angry fist at John Brooke’s umbrella and all it represented.

Like Bhaer with Jo, Dean Priest seeks to ensconce Emily under his umbrella of knowledge and authority, wanting to subordinate her intellectually and emotionally by, in part, causing her to doubt her artistic abilities. In her comprehensive study of Montgomery’s heroines, Elizabeth Rollins Epperly writes that, in a marriage to Dean Priest, Emily

will consign herself to silence or to mimicry of his male voice. In struggling against him, Emily Starr is fighting against the collective weight of male privilege and authority. She can join the voice of privilege and authority if she loses her own voice; Emily’s apparent love struggle with Dean Priest is nothing less than the female writer’s fight for survival. (148)

Indeed, the same can be said about Jo’s relationship with Professor Bhaer since, as with Laurie and Teddy, there are striking comparisons between Professor Bhaer and Dean Priest. Both are older men, peers of the heroines’ fathers. Even more, both are rather unusual suitors; they are less than physically perfect or handsome (Dean, in fact, is called “Jarback” because of his deformity) and have the dark and foreign qualities associated with an “other.” Their pedagogic names reflect the literary and academic institutions and patriarchal authority with which they are both associated: Jo even calls Bhaer “my professor,” and Dean Priest’s name suggests religious and professorial authority even beyond that associated with Professor Bhaer. But most significantly, both men act as mentors and intellectual superiors, critiquing the heroines’ creative efforts and placing Jo and Emily in positions subservient to them.

Like Jo’s with Professor Bhaer, Emily’s relationship with Dean Priest would mean a dangerous surrender of her artistic self. By calling Emily “Star,” Dean reduces her to pretty object, not an equal intellect. Like “Astrophel and Stella,” Emily is the star, Dean the star-lover; their relationship is associated with poetic cycles, the Muse, and the author’s struggle to write. Dean refuses to take her writing and financial independence seriously, particularly in *Emily’s Quest*: “I’m glad you can amuse yourself by writing. It’s a splendid thing to have a little hobby of the kind. And if you can pick up a few shekels by it — well, that’s all very well too.... But I’d hate to have you dream of being a Brontë or an Austen — and wake to find you’d wasted your youth on a dream” (31). No act reflects Dean’s agenda more than his disparagement of her notably-titled novel *A Seller of Dreams* in order to secure her promise to give up writing and marry him: “Dean looked inscrutably at the little packet she held out to him. So this is what had wrapped her away from him all summer — absorbed her — possessed her” (51). Out of jealousy, Dean tells Emily the story is “only cobwebs” and to “stop reaching for the moon. You’ll never get it. Why try to write, any-

way? Everything has already been written" (51-52). Like Jo, Emily burns her manuscript; then, distraught, she trips and falls down the stairs from her bedroom. Emily's temporary crippling leaves her particularly vulnerable to Dean — and to the role of a traditional "little woman." Previously, Emily has resisted Dean's desire to possess her: when, as a girl, she slides over a cliff reaching for a flower and is rescued by him, he tells her that "your life belongs to me henceforth.... Take your wonderful aster home now. It has cost you your freedom" (*Emily of New Moon* 271). Emily responds defiantly by throwing the flower down and crushing it with her foot. But when, in *Emily's Quest*, Emily is engaged to Dean, and Ilse warns her that Dean "must possess exclusively," Emily answers that she doesn't think she will mind, and that she's done with her writing (63). Not until she experiences her supernatural "calling" to Teddy, this time warning him of danger, does Emily realize her connection to Teddy and break her engagement to Dean, at which point Dean reveals that he lied about *A Seller of Dreams*: "I hated the book. You were more interested in it than in me" (96). Emily then sees that Dean is no longer the "clever...well-educated" (30) mentor and teacher she has believed him to be. The comic proposal Emily later receives from the author of the aptly-titled "The Royal Betrothal" is a grotesque version of what Dean wanted from her. Mr. Greaves, a caricature of a romantic author-hero, seeks Emily out after she writes a new ending for his serial, reprinted in the Charlottetown *Argus*. At first melodramatically claiming she "barbarously mutilated" (134) his original story, Greaves suddenly claims instant love in effusive and melodramatic language, and proposes marriage to her; he wishes to "teach [her] the beauty and artistry of sorrow.... What bliss to teach such a pupil!" (135) But Emily, post-Dean, recognizes that such an inequitable, demanding suitor "must be crazy" (135) and forcefully rejects him.

Emily and Teddy do not and cannot meet again as lovers until after Emily has had a number of self-determining experiences. Unlike Jo, Emily has a series of "vivid love affairs" and flirtations with suitors as varied as the local minister and a Japanese prince. Emily takes few of these men seriously and gains a reputation in the family for being "fickle" and "temperamental," but, in her post-Dean consciousness, she articulates her requirements in a love relationship: of the cousin her family had once pressured her to marry almost a decade earlier, for instance, Emily points out that "Andrew wouldn't have listened to me. He believes that the husband is the head of the wife" (150). Emily learns through these varied relationships what she, as an author and independent "woman of means," must demand in a mate. Most importantly, though, Emily learns how to balance writing with relationships; young Emily often neglects her writing when involved romantically (either with Teddy or others), to the detriment of her own self-respect.<sup>10</sup> She and Teddy cannot come together until she learns to balance her writing self with her romantic self — until, when Teddy's

mother says to her, "Emily Starr, I believe pride is a stronger passion with you than love," she can smilingly agree, "Perhaps" (200).

Emily must fall out of child-like love for Teddy in order to love him as an independent "woman of means" and self-sufficient author, and several incidents in her adult life indicate this process. For instance, in *Emily's Quest*, when Emily opens "the [birthday] letter she had written 'from herself at fourteen to herself at twenty-four,'" an old rose Teddy once gave her crumbles to dust (160). "Little Fourteen" asks if Emily has "written your great book" and if she is "Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_" (implying Teddy Kent) living "in the Disappointed House with One-You-Know-Of," and Emily wonders that she had "really ever been young and callow enough to write such flowery, exultant nonsense" (160). Emily's tears, like Jo's, are halted by a present, but Emily's is quite different; rather than a potential husband, it is a major publisher's letter of acceptance for her novel *The Moral of the Rose*. That summer, for the first time, Emily spurns Teddy's whistle-signal: "'Whistle and I'll come to you, my lad,' indeed! No more of that for Emily Byrd Starr. Teddy Kent need not imagine that he could come and go as went the years and find her meekly waiting to answer his lordly signal" (167). Emily ignores him by writing "aimless repetitions of old poems learned in schooldays," implying that resurrected childhood love is, perhaps, an "aimless repetition" as well. Emily and Teddy do not reconcile until they are in their late 20s or perhaps even early 30s, after each has achieved artistic and financial success, and experienced terminated engagements to others. Above all, Emily is a successful author while Teddy, having been "'left...at the altar' [by Ilse<sup>11</sup>] according to the very formula of Bertha M. Clay" (227), a then-popular magazine writer, is, essentially, a jilted man in the fictional tradition that Emily has long since surpassed.

A few scholars argue, as Epperly does, that "Teddy may seem a pale rival for Dean, but at least with him Emily is free to pursue her own work. Teddy, who becomes a famous painter, accepts Emily as his equal without question" (147). This is no insignificant thing for an author-heroine. Marriage to Teddy allows Emily power, autonomy, and artistic stimulation. Moreover, Emily has the upper hand and knows it. To begin with, as a Murray from *New Moon*, she outranks Teddy Kent socially. But especially, Emily consciously has the emotional upper hand as well; once, upon witnessing Teddy's jealousy, she triumphantly writes in her journal: "I like to feel that I *have that much power over Teddy*" (*Emily Climbs* 34).<sup>12</sup> Emily herself is not a jealous lover; even when Teddy is about to marry Ilse, Emily is not envious. Teddy's mother, in particular, cannot understand: "don't you hate Ilse bitterly? She has taken what you wanted. You *must* hate her" (*Emily's Quest* 187). Even when Teddy confesses that "I really did love [Ilse] — in a way," Emily feels "no jealousy of that" (*Emily's Quest* 227). After her relationship with Dean and after witnessing Teddy's debilitating relationship with his mother, Emily is aware of the dangers of possessive love. The

only thing that will truly possess Emily is her writing: as Ilse pensively notes, “my work...doesn’t possess me as yours possesses you” (*Emily’s Quest* 124).

Teddy is not a “pale rival”; instead, he is a possibility for unrestricted, democratic, and unconventional marriage. Emily would have “belong[ed] to Dean body and soul” (*Emily’s Quest* 63), but Emily and Teddy are evenly matched: “Why, Teddy has always belonged to me and I to him. Heart, soul and body,” Emily says, to the shock and horror of her Victorian maiden aunts. (*Emily’s Quest* 227). Furthermore, Emily does not marry a critical “professor,” literally or figuratively; as Emily, in her adolescence, writes in her diary: “Teddy thinks everything I write is perfect, so he’s no use as a critic” (*Emily Climbs* 258). Ilse has complained that Teddy, the artist, is “a duck but he’s selfish, Emily, he really is” (*Emily’s Quest* 65), but a relationship with Teddy will allow Emily the “selfishness” necessary for her own art. Montgomery seems to suggest that this is a preferable and more autonomous identity for a female writer.

Like Jo before her, Emily must also choose between an older, philosophical father figure and passionate and artistic boy next door, but Montgomery’s triangle explores different possibilities. With “literary spinsterhood” not a contemporary option with the reading public, marriage to Teddy represents the best possible course for Emily at that time. Emily Byrd Starr, after marriage, will likely go on writing, and will likely be more successful artistically and financially than her husband. She has the artistic, emotional, and social power in their relationship, and thus, unlike Jo, it is possible for Emily to be wedded to her art and wedded to a man simultaneously. It may not be as ideal as the unconventional “literary spinsterhood” both Montgomery and Alcott were denied for their scribbling heroines, but Emily’s choice is a better option, a more liberated possibility, than being under Dean Priest’s — or any man’s — umbrella.

## Notes

- 1 Since the other two “Jo” books, *Little Men* (1871) and *Jo’s Boys* (1886), take place well after Jo has reached adulthood, they are not included in this study of the two heroines’ *Künstlerroman* chronicles.
- 2 As a child, Emily finds literary inspiration in the last part of a sentimental poem Dean gives her:

*When I whisper blossom in thy sleep  
How I may upward climb  
The Alpine Path, so hard, so steep  
That leads to heights sublime.  
How I may reach that far-off goal  
Of true and honored fame  
And write upon its shining scroll  
A woman’s humble name.*

When she reads the poem, she experiences her “flash” of artistic insight, consecrating it,

- and vows to “climb the Alpine Path and write my name on the scroll of fame” (*Emily of New Moon* 290).
- 3 For example, in a journal entry dated 7 June 1900, Montgomery mentions “the Alcott...stories [which] I read in my teens and have a liking for yet” (*Selected Journals* I 252).
  - 4 Though Perry Miller could be seen as a third candidate, he is not a serious romantic possibility for Emily, despite his infatuation with her. A few critics have proposed that this is due to his economic status, that a boy from Stovepipe Town is ostensibly not good enough for a Murray of New Moon. But I suggest that, more significantly, Perry and Emily are unsuited because Perry cannot comprehend Emily’s artistic vision. His own attempts at poetry are unsophisticated and silly: in *Emily Climbs*, he repeatedly incurs Emily’s scorn and Ilse’s wrath, as well as the ridicule of the whole high school, when he submits puerile poems to its literary magazine, *The Quill*.
  - 5 Amy also wishes to “be the best artist in the whole world,” but, as she willingly submits to the dictates of conventional society and patriarchal authority and is significantly younger, prettier, and more traditional than Jo, she is deemed the appropriate “little woman” for Laurie to marry.
  - 6 Campbell believes Teddy has the upper hand in their relationship, particularly in terms of Teddy’s whistle-signal: “When the mood strikes him, it seems, Teddy can call the tune to which Emily will dance” (140).
  - 7 Parallels can also be made between Mr. March and Emily’s schoolteacher Mr. Carpenter, who both seem to have specific agendas for what Jo and Emily should be writing about; Mr. Carpenter, as his name implies, wishes to construct Emily into a traditional, and specifically Canadian, female author. When Emily is offered the chance to live in New York at the end of high school, he tells her: “I wanted you to be...pure Canadian through and through” (*Emily Climbs* 305). Moreover, like Mr. March, Mr. Carpenter questions the suitability of Emily’s subject matter and deems satires and realism inappropriate for her; in fact, some of his dying words to her are “Remember — pine woods are just as real as — pigstyes — and a darn sight pleasanter to be in” (*Emily’s Quest* 24).
  - 8 “...you could be learning to like me. Would it be a very hard lesson, dear?”  
 “Not if I chose to learn it, but —”  
 “Please choose to learn, Meg. I love to teach, and this is easier than German,” broke in John, getting possession of the other hand....  
 “...I don’t want to be worried about such things. Father says I needn’t, it’s too soon, and I’d rather not” (266).  
 Jo, pointedly, chooses to learn the more difficult German lesson by marrying Friedrich Bhaer.
  - 9 In *Jo’s Boys*, Jo does manage to be a successful children’s author, much like Alcott, but not until long after she has raised two sons and countless waifs and has spent decades as “Mother Bhaer” at the school she and the Professor establish.
  - 10 For instance, when Emily fancies herself in love with Aylmer Vincent, she “neglected her writing and asked Aunt Elizabeth if she could have the old blue box in the attic for a hope chest” (*Emily’s Quest* 38). But when the romance passes, Emily “felt that she had made an absolute fool of herself” and wonders about her capacity to love, but she “took up her pen again with a secret gladness” (40).
  - 11 Comparisons can also be drawn between Amy March and Ilse Burnley, both outgoing, golden, beautiful ladies of society.
  - 12 Moreover, Teddy also recognized Emily’s power over him when he tells his then-fiancée Ilse that “the sirens had raven hair” (*Emily’s Quest* 192), like Emily’s.

## Works Cited

- Alcott, Louisa May. *Life, Letters and Journals*. Ed. Ednah D. Cheyney. London: Sampson, Low, Marston; Searle & Rivington, 1889.
- . *Little Women*. 1868. New York: Macmillan, 1994.
- Campbell, Marie. "Wedding Bells and Death Knells: The Writer as Bride in the Emily Trilogy." *Harvesting Thistles: The Textual Garden of L.M. Montgomery, Essays on Her Novels and Journals*. Ed. Mary Henley Rubio. Guelph: Canadian Children's, 1994. 137-45.
- Epperly, Elizabeth Rollins. *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass: L.M. Montgomery's Heroines and the Pursuit of Romance*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992.
- Fetterley, Judith. "Little Women: Alcott's Civil War." *Feminist Studies* 5 (1979): 369-83.
- MacLulich, T.D. "L.M. Montgomery and the Literary Heroine: Jo, Rebecca, Anne, and Emily." *CCL: Canadian Children's Literature / Littérature canadienne pour la jeunesse* 37 (1985): 5-17.
- Minadeo, Christy Rishoi. "Little Women in the 21st Century." *Images of the Child*. Ed. Harry Eiss. Bowling Green: Bowling Green U Popular P, 1994. 199-214.
- Montgomery, L.M. *Emily Climbs*. 1925. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989.
- . *Emily of New Moon*. 1923. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989.
- . *Emily's Quest*. 1927. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989.
- . *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery, Volume I: 1889-1910; Volume II: 1910-1921; Volume III: 1921-1929*. Ed. Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1985, 1987, 1992.
- Parille, Ken. "'Wake Up and Be a Man': Little Women, Laurie, and the Ethic of Submission." *Children's Literature* 29 (2001): 34-51.
- Pike, E. Holly. "The Heroine Who Writes and Her Creator." *Harvesting Thistles: The Textual Garden of L.M. Montgomery, Essays on Her Novels and Journals*. Ed. Mary Henley Rubio. Guelph: Canadian Children's, 1994. 51-57.
- Rubio, Mary. "Subverting the Trite: L.M. Montgomery's 'Room of Her Own.'" *CCL: Canadian Children's Literature / Littérature canadienne pour la jeunesse* 65 (1992): 6-39.
- 
- 

*Dawn Sardella-Ayres holds a Master's degree in English literature from the University of Pennsylvania and is currently a graduate student of children's literature at Hollins University. She teaches English and Literature in Los Angeles and is presently at work on a book about author-heroines in children's literature.*