

Presumably this is the most desirable effect to achieve in fiction of any kind; Leavitt, Beemudré, and Ewan have accomplished it with elegance and daring.

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In the First Person / Jason Nolan

Remembering Lucy Maud Montgomery. Alexandra Heilbron. Dundurn, 2001. 255 pp. \$26.99 paper. ISBN 1-55002-362-4.

With *Remembering Lucy Maud Montgomery*, Alexandra Heilbron has done a great service to readers and fans of L.M. Montgomery by interviewing so many individuals, many of whom are no longer with us, whose stories and reminiscences would otherwise be lost forever. It is a rare occurrence for an author to have a book of recollections written about her, especially 60 years after her death. It is a fun read and helps readers develop a broader understanding of one of Canada's most important writers. The stories Heilbron brings to us are delightful snapshots into the lives of those sharing their reminiscences and into the life of L.M. Montgomery, offering a perspective that only a few have had. Organized into five sections of interviews that focus on Montgomery as family member, employer, neighbour, teacher, and author as well as a section of selected newspaper and magazine articles about Montgomery published between 1909 and 1942, the book is the product of Heilbron's strong and abiding personal interest in the world of L.M. Montgomery.

The book suffers, however, from a number of defects that limit its value. Foremost is the absence of an apparatus that would make the book useful to scholars and researchers as well as more satisfying to the average reader. The reading experience would be enhanced by knowing more about where these stories come from, the milieu in which they exist, and who the interviewees are aside from their direct relationship with Montgomery. The introduction, woefully short and idiosyncratic, could have set the scene for the interviews and contextualized them within Montgomery's life and within her own life narrative, which includes accounts of some of the stories we are soon to find before us.

The dates on which the interviews took place are not recorded. Aside from being of general interest, such dates would be an important clue in understanding the tone — and, indeed, perhaps the content — of what made it to print. Some of the interviews took place before the publication of the fourth volume of Montgomery's journals in 1998, and perhaps some preceded the publication of the third volume in 1992. But it is in light of the controversial nature of the fourth volume, whose entries cover the dates of the events being remembered in the interviews, that the dating of the interviews becomes important. It is possible that some contributions were selectively slanted to refute what was published or to place an event in a more flattering light. It is equally possible that none of the contributors had read the journals, and it would have been even more delightful to have known which entries are untainted by Montgomery's own recorded bitter memories. Mary Rubio, co-editor of the Montgomery's selected journals whose authorized biography of Montgomery is forthcoming, notes in "A Dusting Off": An Anecdotal Account of Editing the L.M. Montgomery Journals" that many individuals changed their stories and, in some cases, remembered events they had previously said to have forgotten when interviewed after the publication of the first two volumes of the journals in the mid-1980s. As well, the reference information for the reprinted articles in the final section of the book is sparse, limited to just the title and the date; more information here would also have been helpful.

Although there are no clues to this effect in the book itself, some of the interviews are reprints or reworkings of Heilbron's own publications in *The Avonlea Traditions Chronicle*, a magazine she edited for five years. Interviews with Keith Webb, Georgie MacLeod, Luella Veijalainen, Ethel Currie, Beatrice Thurman Hunter, Elsie Davidson, and perhaps others were previously published, as indicated in my list of works cited. In some cases, the tone changes from the original publication, and in others there is an editorial shift in focus. There are also instances where quotations in this book are substantially altered since the original publication. One would have expected that the original publication information be included and reference made to how the material was further developed or revised for publication.

Compare excerpts from the interview with Elsie Davidson as presented in *The Avonlea Traditions Chronicle* in 1996 with excerpts from *Remembering Lucy Maud Montgomery*:

Well, I was a farmer's daughter and Mrs. Macdonald wanted help. Her maid had gone out for holidays or something and she'd called mother and asked her if I could go up there and work and mother was quite delighted to let me go because it was a nice start for me. (Heilbron, "Elsie Bushby Davison" 4)

Well, I was a farmer's daughter and Mrs. Macdonald wanted help. I filled in when her maids were away on occasion, and when the last one left, Lil Meyers, Mrs. Macdonald asked me if I could be her maid and I was delighted. Mother was quite delighted as well to let me go because it was a nice start for me. And it was nice and handy to be going home only a mile and a quarter. (*Remembering Lucy Maud Montgomery* 67)

I never noticed too much around. They were pretty good, you know. I don't

know how she disciplined them at all. And I never knew that she and Mr. Macdonald didn't get along, either. They got along to a point, but I never knew that he was sick with this melancholy disease. I knew he was sick, but I had no idea that he was like he was. He'd go for a holiday or something. He was tired, and he wanted a rest. It was all covered up. ("Elsie Bushby Davidson" 5)

Not that I ever noticed. They were pretty good boys, you know. I don't know how she disciplined them at all. And I never knew that Mr. Macdonald was sick with a melancholy disease. I knew he was sick, but I had no idea what it was, exactly. He always just said he was going away for a holiday or something. He was tired, and he wanted a rest. (*Remembering Lucy Maud Montgomery* 71)

Although the sense and the tone of the responses are not greatly altered, it is highly problematic when an interviewer treats a subject's responses with such casual disrespect. It is possible to compare the inconsistencies in Heilbron's two published transcriptions of these six interviews, but there would be no way to ascertain which is the correct version and even whether sections are complete fabrications. To a point, it leads to question whether some of the interviews took place at all.

Leaving that issue aside, dating the photographs would also be useful, even if only on an acknowledgements page. Photographs taken decades apart grace opposing pages, leaving the reader to guess at their date and provenance. Many photographs have no attribution whatsoever, and one is left to assume that they were taken by the author. Other photographs are accompanied by notice as to who provided them but not who took them. At least one of the pictures is attributed differently in *Avonlea Traditions Chronicle* (22 [1997-1998]: 30) and *Remembering Lucy Maud Montgomery* (62). As well, though it is possible to guess, it would be useful to know which pictures were taken by Montgomery herself. A little more thorough attention to these details would have resulted in a book that inspired a greater level of confidence with respect to the tales told.

Finally, an index would have been most useful, especially due to the nature of the book, where many of the individuals interviewed recount similar or identical situations; without one, the opportunity to cross-reference the material is lost. As well, the author could have noted where events mentioned by the interviewees also appear in Montgomery's published journals, such as the story of when Ethel Currie was hired as Montgomery's housekeeper. Although Heilbron notes that this happened in August, Montgomery's journal claims it happened in July, which is an interesting discrepancy. Given that Montgomery's errors in her copying own journals are well documented, there is no reason to necessarily assume that Heilbron made the error, but it would have made for a more interesting read had Heilbron brought these sort of issues to the fore.

A more compelling reason for both an index and cross-referencing to the journals is evidenced in further discrepancies between the stories of Currie and Montgomery. Both women recount the "blue pill" episode, during which Montgomery accidentally gave her husband "the deadliest germicide on the market" after being given the wrong pills at the Georgetown drugstore (Montgomery [17 Aug. 1934] 286). According to Montgomery, the doctor's arrival with an antidote saved Ewan, but she makes no mention of the events that Currie recounts to

Heilbron: Currie claims that someone from the drugstore called while Montgomery was out and prescribed an egg mixed with soda to be given to Montgomery's husband immediately, adding that "I was told later that if I hadn't had Mr. Macdonald drink that mixture right away, he could have died" (82). Heilbron misses the opportunity to bring these two stories together to enhance the relationship between her book and Montgomery's life record.

After one has made a leap of faith as to the accuracy of the information presented in the book, *Remembering Lucy Maud Montgomery* becomes a fascinating encounter with people whose lives were directly touched by Montgomery; these people can enrich our understanding of an author who spent as much time crafting her persona as she did crafting her fiction. Still, with the sustained questions as to the authenticity and accuracy of the content, it may be wise to take everything in *Remembering Lucy Maud Montgomery* with a grain of salt.

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