

## Editorial: Assessments and Reassessments

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When *Canadian Children's Literature* published its third issue in 1975 "in recognition of L.M. Montgomery's work" (Sorfleet, "Introduction" 4), the editors were motivated by a need to reclaim Montgomery as a writer worthy of academic consideration. Although most of Montgomery's books have been continually in print since *Anne of Green Gables* became a bestseller in 1908, scholarship on her work did not begin until Elizabeth Waterston contributed an overview of Montgomery's life and career to Mary Quayle Innis's collection of essays *The Clear Spirit: Twenty Canadian Women and Their Times* (1966). This first Montgomery issue, republished the following year in book form as *L.M. Montgomery: An Assessment* (1976), reprints Waterston's essay alongside six new papers examining a range of topics, from a comparative reading of Montgomery and Emily Starr as female writers to discussions about the uses of satire, realism, and fantasy in her novels. The fact that Montgomery received her first round of analysis in the pages of a journal that had been conceived in order to "provid[e] much-needed resource material in an essential but neglected area" (Sorfleet, "Editorial" 6) is not coincidental, even though Montgomery's status as a writer for children is only assumed by the authors but not discussed as a central aspect that might shift matters of analysis and reception. Instead, John R. Sorfleet, the inaugural editor, suggests in his introductory remarks about this "Canadian Authoress" that Montgomery's continued popularity is evidenced in part by Anne Shirley's status as "probably Canada's best-known fictional export" ("Introduction" 4).

In planning the final issues of *Canadian Children's Literature* before the journal moves to a new group of editors at the University of Winnipeg, we thought it would be worthwhile to return to this subject of analysis that has been such a central part of CCL since its very beginnings. Scholarship on Montgomery has evolved exponentially over the last 30 years: the articles in the 1975 issue anticipated a momentum of scholarly activity that would begin in the mid-1980s and that today shows no sign of a decline, fueled in large part by the release of *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery* (Oxford University Press) in five volumes since 1985 and by the sustained efforts of the L.M. Montgomery Institute, founded in 1993, whose biennial conferences on Montgomery at the University of Prince Edward Island over the last decade are at the top of a long list of endeavours that help maintain Montgomery's central place in literary and cultural studies. And, as Carole Gerson notes in her contribution to *Making Avonlea: L.M. Montgomery and Popular Culture* (2002), much of that groundbreaking scholarship appears

in the pages of *Canadian Children's Literature* (25-26). Indeed, over the last 30 years, CCL has published 51 articles and 33 reviews on Montgomery (a complete index appears later in this issue). Moreover, as Gerson notes, many of these materials published in *Canadian Children's Literature* "do not treat her as an author of juvenile fiction" (26) and, in fact, "have little to do with children *per se*" (27). As scholarship on Montgomery has recently evolved to focus increasingly on film and television adaptations, popular culture phenomena, and life writing and autobiography, the question of the implications of categorizing Montgomery's books as children's literature or not remains unanswered. The articles and reviews published in this present issue will add to the difficulty of answering that question.

Also troubling the matter of implied audience is the fact that discussions of Montgomery as an important and influential writer have recently cropped up in the kinds of places that would have been unheard of in 1975. Mona Holmund and Gail Youngberg's recent volume *Inspiring Women: A Celebration of Herstory* (2003) profiles twelve women writers who remain popular and influential today, beginning with the reminder that "the late 20th century stars of Canadian literature are almost all women. Many of them are among the most prolific and most widely known contemporary writers in the world" (226). Montgomery appears first in this section, which also profiles Martha Ostenso, Gabrielle Roy, Anne Hébert, Alice Munro, Margaret Laurence, Joy Kogawa, Margaret Atwood, and Carol Shields. Magdalene Redekop, in her contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature* (2004) devoted to the ongoing tension between "the story of a nation and the stories written by its citizens" and specifically to the role of comedy in this national literature, includes Montgomery in a "catalog of comic writers" alongside Robert Kroetsch, Stephen Leacock, Robertson Davies, Mordecai Richler, Thomas King, and several others. In Elizabeth MacLeod's *The Kids Book of Great Canadians* (2004), Montgomery, the author of numerous "wonderful children's books" (32), leads the section devoted to "The Arts," preceding the likes of Oscar Peterson, Céline Dion, Emily Carr, Cornelius Krieghoff, and the Group of Seven.

The ongoing debate of whether Montgomery's books are for younger readers or a general readership gets played out in four of the books under review in this issue, two of which place her at the centre of Canadian children's literature and two of which discuss her work in the larger context of Canadian writing by women by arguing against that implied younger readership. Aïda Hudson and Susan-Ann Cooper's collection of essays *Windows and Words: A Look at Canadian Children's Literature in English*, reviewed by E. Holly Pike, devotes six of its eighteen chapters to discussions of "our most internationally acclaimed children's writer" (Hudson 2), an evaluation that echoes Sorfleet's earlier suggestion that international visibility is a sign of Canadian value, even though, as Pike notes, this disproportionate percentage takes away from sustained analyses of any other Canadian writer

for children and adolescents. In his review of Deirdre Baker and Ken Setterington's *A Guide to Canadian Children's Books in English*, Roderick McGillis observes that the *Guide* is focused primarily on texts published after 1980; as he remarks, "no writer between Confederation and 1944 finds a place in this *Guide*" — except, of course, L.M. Montgomery (122).

Meanwhile, Sandra Sabatini's monograph *Making Babies: Infants in Canadian Fiction*, reviewed by Janice Fiamengo, includes Montgomery in an examination of "canonical as well as extracanonial texts from the same cultural milieu" (5) that form a "literary continuum" across the twentieth century. This juxtaposition facilitates a chapter devoted to a comparative reading of Montgomery's *Anne* series and Frederick Philip Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925), despite the fact that the texts of each author would not likely be classified the same way (35). Identifying Montgomery against the category of children's literature likewise allows Faye Hammill, in *Literary Culture and Female Authorship in Canada 1760-2000* (reviewed in this issue by Cecily Devereux), to include Montgomery's representation of the female author in her celebrated *Emily* series as part of a larger pattern of Canadian female characters who are writers in works by Frances Brooke, Susanna Moodie, Sara Jeannette Duncan, Margaret Atwood, and Carol Shields. The question remains whether supporting the recent feminist criticism that has "challenge[d] the exclusive categorization of [Montgomery] as a children's writer" (Hammill xv) and suggesting that "being classified as a children's writer tends to diminish her status" (Hammill 83) reinforce the devaluation of children's literature as a field of study or as serious literature. Theodore F. Sheckels makes a similar move in his recent book *The Island Motif in the Fiction of L.M. Montgomery, Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, and Other Canadian Women Novelists* (2003) when he claims that his book "assumes, as do many, that L.M. Montgomery is not just a writer of juvenile fiction and treats her work quite seriously" (x). It is worth pondering whether his remark that Montgomery, "once thought to be *nothing more* than a writer of books for adolescent girls, has finally been treated quite seriously by scholars" (3-4; emphasis added) implicitly supports the system that would refuse to take juvenile fiction seriously in the first place.

The five articles in this special double issue likewise trouble the notion of categories by reassessing some of the recurring trends in existing Montgomery scholarship in ways that we hope will prompt further discussion and response. In keeping with the recurring expansion of this critical attention beyond literary analyses of Montgomery's primary texts and into the realms of cultural studies and popular culture, only two of the papers address Montgomery's fiction; they are joined by three more papers that focus on a recent television adaptation attached to Montgomery's name as well as on Montgomery's private role as reader and public role as internationally-acclaimed celebrity. In other words, not only are Montgomery's books up for analysis, but so are aspects of her life and her name.

Clarence Karr kicks off this section by looking at Montgomery's record of her reading experiences of a wide range of texts throughout her life. Montgomery becomes an important case study within a revised theoretical framework that resists dismissing the experiences of readers not trained in the discipline of literary studies and instead proposes to take seriously the responses of real readers in their own environments. By drawing on Montgomery's journals, letters, and periodical pieces, Karr situates the reading experiences of this lifelong "book addict" in ways that will offer new questions to consider in terms of life writing and intertextuality. For instance, given Montgomery's charged response after reading Washington Irving's *Alhambra* in 1903, and given that her subsequent daydream about her own imagined "castle in Spain" became a recurring motif in her inner life, it is worth pondering how Montgomery's experience of reading Irving's novel affects how we in turn read her 1926 novel *The Blue Castle*, in which Montgomery shares this central motif with her heroine, Valancy Stirling.

Monika B. Hilder likewise draws on Montgomery's journals and letters to open up her reading of the tension between legalistic Christianity and the possibilities of spiritual fulfillment in *Anne of Green Gables*, but rather than look for signs of authorial intent in these private documents, Hilder relies on these materials as a way of contextualizing her reading by focusing on the discrepancy between what Montgomery privately states about her anxieties surrounding organized religion and her attempt in the novel to imagine the possibility of a faith centred on a child's imagination and wonder. Calling Montgomery a "comic iconoclast," Hilder reminds us that what begins as Anne's religious training into the socially acceptable Scots-Presbyterian ethos of Avonlea becomes a religious re-education for Marilla. This critical approach likewise begs the question of the novel's implied audience — whether Anne's growing maturity is meant to be an explicit lesson of conformity for younger female readers or whether adult readers are meant to learn alongside Marilla to appreciate Anne's attempts to seek a vivid relationship with God, whom Hilder calls in this context the "ultimate kindred spirit."

Next, Jennifer H. Litster turns her attention to two of Montgomery's under-examined early novels, *The Story Girl* and its sequel, *The Golden Road*, to make thematic links between these two idylls of childhood and two similar books from across the pond, Kenneth Grahame's *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days*. Noting that Montgomery remained a "reluctant children's writer," Litster suggests that *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road* mark Montgomery's attempts to break away from the conventions of popular American fiction on which *Anne of Green Gables* is modeled and borrow from British literary representations of Arcadian childhood, specifically two books by Grahame that are clearly intended to appeal to adult readers. This suggestion is noteworthy, given that *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road* would later be incorporated into a television series designed to fit the thematic

parameters of two popular *Anne of Green Gables* miniseries produced in the 1980s. In her contribution to this issue focusing on the television series *Road to Avonlea*, Patsy Kotsopoulos seeks to counter scholarly approaches that devalue nostalgia as a form of cultural engagement. Similar to Karr's proposed move away from a constructed "reader" to actual readers, Kotsopoulos draws on the responses of 50 female viewers of this popular series to quantify the dominant attractions and responses that the series promotes. Although *Road to Avonlea* was marketed as a "family" series and in fact aired as part of the "CBC Family Hour" timeslot, Kotsopoulos discovers that more than two-thirds of her respondents were single and that almost as many watched the series by themselves. As well, disputing the claim that nostalgia's escapism is necessarily negative, Kotsopoulos's findings demonstrate that her respondents' engagement with this representation of a simplified past actually points to a displaced critique of the failings of the present, making for a viewing experience that is far more complex than the reductive discussions of nostalgia allow.

Finally, Lorraine York draws on theories from film studies and sociology to investigate Montgomery's life as a celebrity, an aspect of her career that has been largely overlooked in recent scholarship. York sees Montgomery's journals as well as her scrapbooks as sites in which Montgomery could intervene in the way that she and her work were seen and discussed in the popular press. Although both journal and scrapbook remained private domains within Montgomery's lifetime, York notes that Montgomery was increasingly aware that interest in her work would extend beyond her life and thus carefully prepared "private" documents that she knew would someday become public. Thus, although Montgomery could not control or respond publicly to the way she and her work were represented, this rich archive of private documents that are now scrutinized by scholars and readers grants her the final word in these representations. Clearly, then, as interest in Montgomery's life and work continues to grow, so too have the critical methods and approaches that push the boundaries surrounding literary studies to spill onto a whole range of disciplines; the most recent scholarship on Montgomery — about the intersection between photography, sexuality, and autobiography (Gammel), about the cultural tensions between lesbian desire and compulsory heterosexuality (Robinson), and about representations of war from the vantage point of the Canadian homefront (Tector) — likewise considers Montgomery's life and fiction in exciting new ways.

Moreover, not only is *Anne of Green Gables* a literary character, but as a representative figure she is also visual and ideological. For instance, in 2003, the same year that the Children's Literature Association and Scarecrow Press released a paperback reissue of Mavis Reimer's collection of essays *Such a Simple Little Tale: Critical Responses to L.M. Montgomery's Anne of Green Gables* (1992) and Oxford University Press reissued Kate

Macdonald's *The Anne of Green Gables Cookbook* (1985), ECW Press published Allan Gould's satirical volume *Anne of Green Gables vs. G.I. Joe: Friendly Fire Between Canada and the U.S.* Although there is no actual mention of Montgomery's literary character anywhere in the book, the cartoon Anne on the cover and in subsequent pages is depicted arguing with a uniformed American who is four times as tall and twice as wide as she is. This depiction situates Anne (or, rather, a visual representation of her) as metonymically standing in for the nation in its relations with the United States, a move that divorces her from Montgomery's literary text and from questions of implied audience and that places her (and, by extension, Canada) in an inferior power position (female, child, miniature) against the United States (here shown as male, adult, large, and gun-toting). Janet Lunn's recent biography of Montgomery, *Maud's House of Dreams: The Life of Lucy Maud Montgomery* (2002), also makes assumptions about its adolescent audience by ending Montgomery's story at the point of her marriage and by glossing over the rest of her life in one paragraph. As Litster makes clear when reviewing Lunn's biography in the pages of a previous issue of *CCL*, this creative decision tells a very incomplete story of Montgomery's life, given that it is well known to readers of her journals that Montgomery and her husband did not "live happily ever after." A similar comment can be made about Harry Bruce's biography *Maud: The Life of L.M. Montgomery* (1992), reissued with slight modifications as *Maud: The Early Years of L.M. Montgomery* (2003) with no mention of its earlier incarnation. On the other hand, MacLeod's *Lucy Maud Montgomery: A Writer's Life* (2001), although aimed at a younger audience than Bruce's and Lunn's books, does not shy away from the difficulties in Montgomery's life even while it presents them in ways appropriate for younger readers.

Finally, this double issue anticipates several landmark studies about Montgomery scheduled for publication throughout the next year: a critical edition of *Anne of Green Gables*, edited by Cecily Devereux (Broadview Press), which examines the book's relationship with English-Canadian nationalism and British imperialism; Irene Gammel's collection of essays *The Intimate Life of L.M. Montgomery* (University of Toronto Press), which follows the success of two previous collections, *Making Avonlea: L.M. Montgomery and Popular Culture* (2002) and, co-edited with Elizabeth Epperly, *L.M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture* (1999); the fifth and final volume of *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery*, edited by Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston (Oxford University Press); and Rubio's long-awaited biography of Montgomery, the result of many years of research. Whether we consider Montgomery to be a writer for children, an author whose works are part of a continuum of survival literature by women, a specifically Canadian writer or an internationally-recognized writer, a diarist whose observations of smalltown life in Prince Edward Island and Ontario form a unique archive of female experience, or the creator of a popular culture phenomenon that

attracts participants of all ages and backgrounds, all of these forthcoming studies will continue to alter how readers and scholars alike regard this popular, influential, and ever relevant author.

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