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DARKNESS AND ECSTASY



The Selected Journals of L. M. Montgomery. Vol. 2: 1910–1921. Ed. Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston. Oxford University Press, 1987. 443 pp., \$29.95 cloth. ISBN 0-19-540586-2.

"[T]he contrast between my real self and what those worshippers of *Anne* believe me to be is too ludicrous," wrote Lucy Maud Montgomery in her journal after having entertained "an adoring circle" of young women from Jarvis Street Collegiate in December of 1917 (*Selected Journals II*, 232). This second volume of Montgomery's journals, covering

the thirty-fifth to forty-sixth years of her life, would prove a stiff antidote to any contemporary efforts to see Montgomery as a romantic extension of her harum-skarum red-haired fictional creation. Readers of Volume One, the journals of 1889 to 1910, will find here a darkening tale; the youthful tribulations of Montgomery in the household of her stern grandparents will pale beside this chronicle of loss and suffering. A husband found subject to fits of religious melancholia, the loss of her closest female friend, and the spectre of global war hang over these entries – an overlapping vision of private and public hell which is relieved only by the ecstatic experience of motherhood, and by Montgomery's characteristically rapturous glimpses of natural beauty. It is as though the account of her nervous breakdown in 1910 which ends the first volume of journals forms the prelude to an approaching storm.

In their introduction, the editors of the journals make strong claims for their documentary value, and historians will no doubt find those claims supported by the material presented in this volume. Not only do we have a painfully minute detailing of one Canadian woman's perception of the First World War, of the first experience of riding in an automobile and seeing an airplane, we have a veritable mine of riches for the field of Canadian women's history. This is a central document for any student of early twentieth-century Canadian women; Montgomery, for example, is a keen observer of contemporary marriage – a ritual which, in her experience, often tends to be a pragmatic agreement rather than the ultimate meeting of "kindred spirits."

Friends marry because they fear becoming "old maids" – one girlhood friend, standing up to be married for this reason, turns "the most gruesome *livid green*," Lucy writes, (2). But this too is merely a prelude to Montgomery's own matrimonial "scene"; writing of her wedding dinner, she recalls "I felt a sudden horrible inrush of *rebellion* and *despair*. I wanted to be free! I felt like a prisoner . . . At that moment if I could have torn the wedding ring from my finger and so freed myself I would have done it!" (68). The long-speculated-about reluctance of Montgomery to provide her fictional heroines with the traditional novelistic orange-blossom and lace nuptial finale finds a parallel in her own reluctance to face marital "closure." Linguistically, this resistance to closure gets played out in Montgomery's attachment to her own name; "Somehow," she wrote six months after her marriage, "I felt sorry at giving up my old name . . . To be sure, I shall always keep it in literature. But there will be a difference . . ." (67). "Literature," for Montgomery, became the space where "Miss Montgomery" could resist "Mrs. Macdonald," where the wedding ring could be, at least figuratively, cast from the finger.

Readers and critics who are now turning their attention toward Montgomery's "Emily" series (*Emily of New Moon*, *Emily Climbs*, and *Emily's Quest*) will find these journals especially enlightening. As P.K. Page writes in her Afterword to the recent New Canadian Library edition of *Emily Climbs*, though one is hesitant in ascribing autobiographical status to works of the imagination, "In the light shed by her journals, it is start[lingly] apparent that Emily and L.M. Montgomery have much in common" (241). But the journals give us more: they give us insight into the social and psychological conditions which played a part in Montgomery's decision to begin that new series. For her, Anne was a spirit of pre-war time innocence: "[S]he belongs to the green, untroubled pastures and still waters of the world before the war" (309). For readers who may never have had the slightest notion of connecting the name of Lucy Maud Montgomery with world politics, this distinction between pre-war and post-war heroine may provide material for much further study. On the personal level, too, Emily is born out of chaos and loss; Montgomery becomes restive at the thought of writing another Anne book in 1913, when she begins her third, *Anne of the Island*: "I feel as if *Anne* and all pertaining to her had been long left behind" (147). For Montgomery, Anne is a creature of the "Island," and the island has been lost to her since 1911, the year of her grandmother's death and her removal from the house and marriage to Rev. Ewan Macdonald. The war years, with their constant nervous tension, only increase Montgomery's frustration with the Anne books: "I'm tired of the kind," she writes in 1918, one month after the armistice, "I've outgrown it. I want to do something different" (278). But the final break comes in 1920, the year after the traumatic loss of her best friend Frede Campbell, and the discovery of her husband's mental aberrations. The recalcitrant present called for a new heroine.

The editorial practises which inform the volume are set out clearly in the Introduction. Some descriptions, for example, which are available in Montgomery's memoir, *The Alpine Path*, are deleted here for the sake of simplicity. But in addition, "some entries about the war" (xx) and some detailing Montgomery's many ailments are deleted. Given what I have described as the journal's considerable contribution to what we know of Montgomery and her political milieu, the former choice needs elaboration: what sorts of war news entries were left out? A social historian might also prefer that details of everyday maladies be retained, or at least summarized briefly in notes.

One feature of this edition which deserves special mention is the creative use of photographs. In Volume One, relevant photographs from Montgomery's collection appear on separate pages, at intervals. In this volume, the editors have combined text and photograph exactly as Montgomery tended to do when assembling her journal, placing appropriate photos, upon which she would sometimes comment specifically, between the leaves. This technical feat adds greatly to the reader's enjoyment of the journal – to the feeling, as Lucy Maud Montgomery herself expressed it, of having "relived" those years "more vividly and intensely than . . . in reading them" (405).

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ANNE: THE BOOK FROM THE FILM

The Anne of Green Gables storybook. Based on the Kevin Sullivan film of Lucy Maud Montgomery's classic novel. L.M. Montgomery. Adapted by Fiona McHugh. Firefly Books, 1987. 79 pp., \$16.95 \$9.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920668-43-7, 0-920668-42-9.

The back cover of this latest production of the *Anne* industry announces that "younger readers (and grown-ups who have a heart-felt affection for the story) can enjoy a briefer, illustrated version [of *Anne of Green Gables*] based on the Kevin Sullivan production that thrilled millions. *The Anne of Green Gables* storybook contains simpler language for young readers, the storyline and 76 lovely full colour photographs from the Emmy award-winning television production." The publicity writer also assures us that this edition "is a book that every lover of 'Anne' will treasure." I for one, demur. The language is not significantly simpler than in the original novel, the storyline in following the film deviates from Montgomery's novel, and the 76 lovely photographs serve merely as expensive decoration for those who do not own a VCR. This 79 page