

# Lucy Maud Montgomery

## 1874-1942

ELIZABETH WATERSTON

*She was born on a beautiful island. Her mother died when she was very young. Her father left her with an old lady and an old man, in an apple-orchard, by the sea. When she grew up, she was put under a vow, never to leave the old people. But a young man loved her, and after ten years of waiting he carried her off, away from the island.*<sup>1</sup>

This is the language of fairy-tale. It seems to be the first way to tell the story of Lucy Maud Montgomery. Girls following her biography in H. M. Ridley's *Life of L. M. Montgomery* may feel they are reading another romance in the sequence of "Anne" and "Emily" and "Pat" and "Story Girl" books.

Many women *have* lived "fabulous" lives. But in L. M. Montgomery's case the real miracle is that she could exploit her experience in an enduring art-form. She universalized her story; she recreated it against vivid regional settings; she structured it into mythical patterns. She retold the legends she had lived, in haunting and memorable style.

She used her life materials in a way that brought her personal fame, and brought her country's literature a popular international recognition. Literary critics throughout the Western world saw at once the values she had achieved. If subsequent sophisticated criticism agreed to laugh at or to by-pass the creator of "Anne," critics today are less ready to be patronizing.

We find in her life, her letters, her journals, the story of an important craftsman, a professional writer fighting to clarify and improve the conditions of an artist's work. And in her novels we find a subtle and illuminating use of archetypal patterns, particularly of the recurring myths of girlhood.

If we re-examine her life story and look at her books as in part an unconscious supplement to the biography, we come close to watching the miracle of the creative imagination.

Born in 1874, in a North Shore village on Prince Edward Island, Lucy Maud Montgomery was brought as a baby from Clifton to

Cavendish, to her mother's family. Her grandmother MacNeill gave her a home when her young mother, Clara Woolner MacNeill Montgomery, died twenty-one months after Lucy Maud's birth. Her father, Hugh John Montgomery, left the Island to strike out for the West, and settled in Prince Albert.

Lucy Maud Montgomery's memories of childhood were very intense. She could recall "spots of time" from her third year on. She was a bright, quick child: when she started school she moved eagerly through the old P.E.I. "readers," with their characteristic Maritime blend of New England and British writers. Years later she would place on the title-pages of her books verses from the same range of great Romantic and Victorian writers of America and Britain: Whittier, Emerson, Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes; and Tennyson, Byron, Cowper, and Burns.

Life was dominated by the grandparents' notions of how a little girl should dress and behave. She was a solitary child, creating imaginary friends, and living in the book-worlds of Bunyan and Scott and Thackeray. Slowly and sensitively she realized the beauty of her native setting: the apple-orchard slopes of the MacNeill farm; the red-earth, tree-lined road winding past pond and woods to the village of Cavendish; the blueberry barrens; and the circling, sounding sea.

She responded, and she wrote. She phrased her impressions of the world around her in the formal and already old-fashioned diction of Thomson's *Seasons*. She liked, later, to tell the story of showing her earliest lines to her family--who complained, "It doesn't rhyme!" But one point of the story is that although she defended the "blankness" of her verse, she was willing to re-work it, producing soon reams of rhyme. It was a first, characteristic effort to adjust to critical suggestions. From the beginning it was not just self-expression that she wanted--it was recognition. She wanted to write, but she also wanted to be read. She sent off her first manuscript, hopefully, when she was eleven, to an American magazine, *The Household*. It was returned, but she tried again, this time for a Canadian publication. It would be four years before her first appearance in print, but those years were characterized by an amazing persistence. Composing, copying, mailing, continued in the face of total lack of interest--this would not be in the scope of most twelve-year-old, thirteen-year-old, fourteen-year-old lives.

The first heartening acceptance came for a verse-narrative, reworking a P.E.I. legend, sent to the Charlottetown *Patriot*. This was in the winter of 1889-90, and the manuscript was sent from the far West, for Lucy Maud had now moved out to Prince Albert to join her father. From Prince Albert, while she was in high school, she sent other poems and sketches to Montreal, to Charlottetown, and to New York.

The reunion with her father was brief. He had remarried and although she enjoyed the company of her step-brother and step-sisters, the adolescent girl did not fit comfortably into the new home. The year, so productive of immediate literary work, never seemed "usable" later: she by-passed it when she was expoiing other events of her girlhood

and assigning bits of her own experience to her fictional heroines.

Meanwhile, the young Islander trailed back to Cavendish to finish school and to write entrance examinations for Prince of Wales College. In 1893 she moved to Charlottetown to attend the College (where courses covered the final two years of high school and the first two of university). Her one-year course qualified her for a teacher's licence. In the same year she had her first "pay" for literary work: two subscriptions to the magazine that accepted her poem, "Only a Violet." It was an American magazine.

L. M. Montgomery (as she now signed her manuscripts) continued to write and submit stories and poems to Canadian and American magazines, after she had taken her teacher's licence and begun to work at Bideford School. Most of the manuscripts came back, but enough were accepted (though without any monetary reward) to make the young author decide to get further training in the field of literature. She went to Halifax in 1895, enrolled at Dalhousie College, and took a course in English literature from Archibald MacMechan, himself a poet and short story writer. The alternative for an Islander would be McGill--many of the characters in her stories go to the Montreal university; but L. M. Montgomery's formal education was all in the Maritimes. During her year in Halifax she earned her first money for writings: five dollars from *Golden Days* in Philadelphia; five dollars from the *Halifax Evening Mail*; twelve dollars from the *Philadelphia Youth's Companion*. She was also placing more and more work with the Sunday School papers, enough to encourage her ambition for a career as a writer.

In 1896, back on Prince Edward Island, school-teaching left little time or energy for composition. But for many months she worked at her writing each morning from six to seven, by lamplight, sitting on her feet to keep warm in the old farmhouse where she was boarding.

She resigned her teaching job two years later to return to Cavendish. The death of her grandfather MacNeill in 1898 left her grandmother alone. L. M. Montgomery decided to see if she could make a living by her writing, eked out by the money her grandmother made as local postmistress. Lucy Maud was twenty-two years old; she was selling enough to cover board and clothing; she was improving her work. "I never expect to be famous," she wrote. "I merely want to have a recognized place among good workers in my chosen profession." In the year after her grandfather's death, in double dedication to family and career, she promised her grandmother to stay and work at home.

Briefly, she interrupted her Island life when she accepted a job on the Halifax *Daily Echo* in November, 1901. She moved into a Halifax boarding-house, and for almost a year wrote a weekly gossip column, edited a page of society letters, proof-read, answered the phone, and did free "write-ups" of the advertisers' goods. She was learning to work under pressure, to produce for a given audience. Meantime she could submit manuscripts to other publications, with a growing percentage of acceptances. She was sending to more sophisticated journals now: *Ainslie's*, *The Delineator*, *The Smart Set*, published in the eastern States.

The young author acquired "pen-pals" among other young people aspiring to literary success. She began an interesting correspondence, for instance, with Ephraim Weber, a Kitchener man who had gone homesteading in Alberta, but shared her literary ambitions and frustrations: "We'll be dead long before Canadian literature will be a bread-and-butter affair." By June, 1902, she was writing all her friends to tell them she was going home to the Island, hoping for more free time for writing.

Settled again in Cavendish, she was beginning a long courtship with a young Presbyterian minister, the Reverend Ewan Macdonald, a fine-looking man a few years older than she, and product of the same kind of schooling and family. She worked hard at her sketches and stories, mailing them to a great variety of magazines: *Canadian Magazine*, *McClure's*, the *Family Herald*, *Current Literature*, the *Boston National*, *Sunday School Times*, the *Battle Creek Pilgrim*, *Modern Women*, *New York Gunton's*, *Lippincott's*. Her letters are filled with indefatigable zest and eager interest in the possibilities for publication. She was reading *Trilby*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Story of an African Farm*, the poetry of Markham, catching up on contemporary best-sellers. She was puzzling over matters of faith, the possibility of psychic experience, the mystery of pain, evolution, the divinity of Christ, eagerly discussing, exploring, opening her mind to any new trend of thought. She was simultaneously re-exploring the Bible, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and Emerson. The best way to catch a notion of her work at this time is to read *Further Chronicles of Avonlea*, published much later, but consisting mostly of stories written in her early twenties, "pot-boilers" as she herself scornfully dubbed them, but intriguing in their range of interests.

She could report making \$591.85 in 1904. Ideas for stories and poems came fast, caught into notebook jottings, set aside till a mood or a market suggested a way of "working up." She could pass along practical advice: "To work at once, stick to it, write something every day, even if you burn it up after writing it."

In 1904, she re-read a note-book entry: "Elderly couple apply to orphan asylum for a boy. By a mistake a girl is sent them." Although her first intention was to work this notion into a short story for a Sunday School paper, she found the character "grew on her" so much that the work expanded to book length. She worked on it for eighteen months, keeping other writing on the go at the same time. The manuscript was mailed out hopefully to a publisher, and rejected. Mailed again, three more times, to other possible publishers, including Macmillan. Rejected again--and finally stowed away by the author in discouragement.

Meanwhile she had placed another story, *Kilmeny of the Orchard*, in serial form, with an American magazine, and other stories with the *Chicago Blue Book*, *New York Watson's*, *Chicago Rural Magazine*. She made about \$800 in 1906, but by dint of unremitting writing. She rarely left Cavendish; her grandmother was now eighty-two, and the younger woman had almost all the housework to do. She was reading less, and

an odd mixture : the Book of Job, Upton Sinclair's "hideous" *The Jungle*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice through the Looking Glass*.

Then spring came, and wonderful news. The manuscript of *Anne of Green Gables*, which she had dug out, re-worked, and sent off to one more publisher, was accepted. "I am blatantly pleased and proud and happy," she said, "and I shan't make any pretence of not being so."

The L. C. Page Company of Boston, "her" publisher, was not a major house, but they did handle Bliss Carman, Charles G. D. Roberts, and other writers well known to Maritime readers. They offered 10 percent royalties (nine cents on a wholesale price of ninety cents), plus a flat sum for dramatic rights, and bound her to give them first refusal of all her books for the next five years. Pitman's of London would hold the English rights. On the whole, acceptable terms, and certainly a glorious realization of the long, long dream of having a full-length book published.

In June, 1908, the first copy of *Anne of Green Gables* arrived from the publishers, attractively bound, in good clear print on good firm paper—a format that would stand up to the readings and re-readings that awaited it when it reached the hundreds of thousands of its young audience.

The book instantly appealed to an incredibly large market, and one not limited to girls. It brought floods of letters to its author, including a note from Bliss Carman, and one from Mark Twain. The proud author thrilled to Mark Twain's comment: in *Anne* she had created "the dearest, and most lovable child in fiction since the immortal Alice." *Anne of Green Gables* went into four editions in three months, and rolled on from there into one printing after another.

The terms of the publishers' contract did not include any sliding scale of royalties for this run-away best-seller. If the author wanted to cash in on the "Anne-mania" she must get to work on a sequel. The publishers insisted that she should write "like mad" to meet the demand. She settled into a new routine: two hours of writing, one of transcribing onto the typewriter—thinking out plot and dialogue as she worked around the house. She was less than happy with her new book. It didn't "grow"; she had to "build" it. She blocked it all out in her mind before writing it. "All the incidents have happened...and I have only to write about them now."

Meanwhile she house-cleaned, sewed, gardened, played the organ for the church choir. The Reverend Ewan Macdonald was still hovering near, trying to persuade her to marry him. He found adamant refusal for a number of reasons: her grandmother, her writing commitments, her career, her new book—reasonable barriers multiplied. There were still serious puzzles in her religious thinking also: "I call myself a Christian, but oh!"

In November, 1908, she sent off the manuscript of *Anne of Avonlea*. She was feeling tired, head-achey, nervous, worn out by the publicity

surrounding "that detestable Anne." "Petty flings of malice and spite" followed local readings of the book. She was brooding over "certain worries and troubles that have seemed ever present in my life for the past six years [i.e., since 1902]. They are caused by people and circumstances over which I have no control, so I am quite helpless in regard to them and when I get rundown I take a too-morbid view of them." A favourite aunt died in 1909. That year she refused an invitation to speak at a World's Congress of Women in Toronto: "couldn't get away."

But in the fall of 1909 she started a new book—beginning by composing the first sentence and the last paragraph. *The Story Girl* she considered "away ahead of *Anne* from a literary point of view." She enjoyed writing this tale of a golden summer, a gathering on the Island of a family group, focused and dramatized by the story-telling skill of the one gifted cousin. Writing this nostalgic book about the "few opulent months" gave the author great pleasure. It occupied her most of 1910. While it was in the making her publishers brought out *Kilmeny of the Orchard* (1910), a re-working of a story previously published serially.

*The Story Girl* was published in May, 1911. The year had already brought a major change in L. M. Montgomery's life. Her grandmother died, at the age of eighty-seven, thirteen years after the grandfather's death and the restraining promise to stay on. Lucy Maud Montgomery now felt free to marry, in July, 1911, Ewan Macdonald, and to set out on a wedding trip to England and Scotland. Like the teen-age trip to her father in Prince Albert, this long voyage never seemed usable to the author. There are no references in any of her later books to the sights and experiences of this long-dreamt-of tour. She returned to Canada, not to Prince Edward Island, but to Leaskdale, Ontario, where Mr. Macdonald had accepted a call.

When she left the Island, L. M. Montgomery had produced four works of unequal value. *Kilmeny of the Orchard* is fervid in style, melodramatic in plot. It followed a contemporary fad for books about psychosomatic impairment. Kilmeny's dumbness is not unlike the hysterical crippling of the child in *The Secret Garden* (1911), and her pathos is linked with that of "Freckles" in Gene Stratton Porter's novel (1904), her violin-playing with that of *The Girl of the Limberlost* (1912). *Trilby* contributes something to the tone. But L. M. Montgomery set her plot of impediment released by love in an Island setting. Kilmeny in her magic trance is guarded by an old aunt and uncle and a gypsy boy, in the best Gothic tradition, but her Eden is a clearly realized orchard, with "real toads"—and an indoor world of antimacassars.

In *Anne of Green Gables*, the world of dour propriety is assaulted by the daemonic force of a red-headed child brought miraculously from "off the island." This book seems almost untouched by timely fashions in "girls' stories." It opens its casements into timeless myths of youth and growth and the quest for identity. Every incident in it is at the same time vivid and deeply suggestive: Anne comes down a long lane with Matthew, to the old farm where angular Marilla sits between a west window flooded by sunlight and an east window framing a cherry tree in

bloom but "greened over by a tangle of vines." Anne dyes her red hair green. She is given first a brown dress by Matthew, then a green one by Marilla. Anne makes her "kindred spirit," Diana, drunk, just before she herself walks a ridge-pole and breaks an ankle. Midway through the book she breaks a slate over Gilbert's head, then must work out her resentment of him and accept his "friendship" as the book ends. Psychologists today would interpret the story symbolically; they would suggest that reading such a story probably helps young girls accept imaginatively the processes of growing up and edging toward adult physical passion. For the millions of girls who have "identified" with Anne, these deep patterns *may* work in some such subconscious way; but the book satisfies also in its romantic pantheism, its regional humour, and its fresh sense of the excitement of language. L. M. Montgomery knew more than the psychologists about the dreams and the anxieties of adolescent girls; her childhood loneliness, her early power of expression and her suspended maturing had kept open the channel to "lost time."

A glance at *Anne of Avonlea* shows a decrease of power. Anne, "half-past sixteen," putting in a year of teaching, is a "Sleeping Beauty." All action rises from minor characters. They interest because they represent types that will recur: a cranky old man from New Brunswick; a pair of ill-matched twins; a gifted, poetic "Yankee" boy; a long-waiting spinster. L. M. Montgomery was not yet ready for a real study of late adolescence. Anne's romance builds no suspense. (There are good regional bits still, such as Mrs. Lynde's view of a neighbour: "a slack-twisted creature who washes her dishes sitting down.")

*The Story Girl* might seem at first reading equally episodic. But the book begins on a May morning on the road to an orchard-farm, and runs rhythmically to November, when "the sharp tops of the spruces" stand "Against the silvery sky." It presents three mysteries: that of the old "witch," Peg Bowen; that of the secret chamber of the "Awkward Man", and that of the family "blue chest," heritage of broken romance. The "Story-Girl," Sara, motherless, gifted, differs from Anne in that her father exists though in the background. (Anne, we remember, dreamt of being called "Cordelia," like Lear's loving daughter.) And Sara's circle can meet with the grown-up world of adults, occasionally, but happily, at twilight, in the orchard. The boy who tells the story knows himself to be only temporarily on "the Island." The identification of island with orchard with spring with youth is tactfully handled and effective. All these things give organic unity to *The Story Girl*. They justify L. M. Montgomery's own fondness for the book.

She had now left Cavendish and the routines of her old home. The new life would have its new routines: running the manse, helping with parish work, women's groups, choirs, Sunday school. New duties would be added, a year later, with motherhood. Like most women-writers of her generation she had always had at least two lives: that of producing artist and that of conscientious house-keeper. The "woman's world" was hers by no choice of her own. What woman in 1912, in a small provincial town, could expect to resign from this sphere? The artist's world was a different matter. There was nothing automatic in the intense

determination that freed a couple of hours a day for writing and revising, and kept the imagination active in undeviating devotion to a régime of steady craftsmanship. L. M. Montgomery had inherited some special talent, and had grown up in a gossipy community where anecdotes were valued, and a good raconteur much admired; she had worked at her craft in hope of money and a career. But now the real mystery appears: what force, what drive, what aspirations powered the undeviating drive on through the long string of successful books, one every other year, from the year of her marriage till 3 years before her death? Not only for the royalty money, welcome as that was in a small-town manse, but for other rewards, she found time to detach herself from the "real" world of Leaskdale, to continue the tales of the other "reality," she remembered island of adolescence.

*Chronicles of Avonlea* was published in 1912. In this set of Island stories Anne Shirley appears very briefly, and rarely as a moving force. These tales of proud poverty, of loneliness, of frustrated courtships are interesting experiments in point of view. Romance and sensibility are filtered through the practical viewpoint of matter-of-fact narrators, the unpoetic neighbours who watch poignant events. "Sentiment and humour" (as L. M. Montgomery says of one of the *Chronicles* characters) "wage an equal contest."

*The Golden Road* (1913) is an elegy on childhood. It completes the seasonal cycle of *The Story Girl*, running from December through the riches of summer to "sere" autumn in the orchard setting. Most mysteries of the earlier book find rather prosaic fulfilment: a bride for the Awkward Man, a visit to church for the Witch. The "Story-Girl," Sara, tells a new cycle of tales: Indian and classical legends, and local folk tales, while her sad alternate, Sara Ray, suffers new repressions. The children's rituals and fears are convincing and funny. But the family disperses as the book ends, and a sadness tinges the story.

Perhaps the elegiac mood reflected the author's entry into a new phase of life. Her first son, Chester Cameron, was born in 1912. A second infant, Hugh, born in 1914, lived only for a day. In 1915 the birth of Ewan Stuart completed the Macdonalds' family.

By this time, war had broken out, and the manse was touched by the tension in all Canadian life. L. M. Montgomery turned once again to the story of Anne, to satisfy "all the girls all over the world who [had] wanted more." It was a relief to escape to girlhood and romance and the friendships and escapades of student days, "pre-war."

*Anne of the Island* (1915) takes Anne away to the mainland and to maturity. Anne is at college, involved in the love-stories of her friends and in a delusive romance with "Royal Gardner." Gilbert lurks near, offering apples. Anne rejects his first offer of love, in a very real moment of tension and fear. The reconciliation at the close is autumnal and subdued. The whole book is perfectly adapted to its audience of



adolescent girls, in its timidity, its repressions, and its lyric romanticism and idealism. The book is "real" too in the gentle growth of Anne's friendships with other girls as she comes nearer to a sense of her own identity. The moving climax to this development occurs when a "Mainland" friend takes her to "Bolingbroke," her birthplace, where she feels "not an orphan any longer."

The major weakness in plot is the ending, when Anne's "spell" is broken, and she accepts her love for Gilbert, because of a melodramatic sudden illness and miraculous cure. But such a resolution is acceptable in myth; and once again L. M. Montgomery had released mythic energies in the story she had created. She had prepared for such a supervenience of miracle by the recurring use of symbolic settings, suggestive of Eden. The tone of the closing is wistful, perfect for its insecure audience and its saddened time.

Emotions stirred by the war had led L. M. Montgomery to a revived activity in poetry. In 1916 she brought out *The Watchman and Other Poems*, dedicated to the Canadian soldiers who had died in the war. The title poem is a meditative monologue on the first Easter, in a manner reminiscent of Browning. The other poems, lyrics of sea, of hills and woods (rather heavily fraught with dryads and dingles and fisher-folk and moonrise) are mostly reprints from a surprisingly long list of magazines, *Youth's Companion*, *Forward*, *Maclean's Magazine*, *East and West*—and fifteen others, all markets for occasional poems. These are Edwardian, water-colour descriptions:

Elusive shadows linger shyly here  
And wood-flowers blow, like pale, sweet spirit-bloom,  
And white, slim birches whisper, mirrored clear  
In the pool's lucent gloom.

This volume marks an important change. It was published by the Canadian firm of McClelland, Goodchild and Stewart in 1916, and by Stokes of New York in 1917. Constable's of London issued an English edition in 1920. The old connection with the Page Company of Boston was broken. The galling sense that she had had less than a fair return for the best-selling *Anne of Green Gables* had irked L. M. Montgomery throughout the five-year period when she was bound to give Page's the first refusal of her new books. Now she moved happily into an arrangement that involved a reputable Canadian publisher along with American and British affiliates. (English rights were later transferred from Constable's to Hodder and Stoughton.)

In the next six years, the new publishers brought out *Anne's House of Dreams* (1917), *Rainbow Valley* (1919), and *Rilla of Ingleside* (1921). All three are shadowed by war. The focus moves from Anne to her Family. Even in *Anne's House of Dreams* Anne and Gilbert have become unreal, and their friends seem phoney and sentimental. Owen Ford speaking:

"The rose is the flower of love—the world has acclaimed it so for centuries. The pink roses are love hopeful and

expectant — the white roses are love dead and forsaken — but the red roses — ah, Leslie, what are the red roses?"

"Love Triumphant," said Leslie in a low voice.

Not low enough, say we — but the author seems unable to suppress this false strain. The real vitality in the book lies in the middle-aged, gossipy ladies, Susan and Miss Cornelia.

The gossip continues in *Rainbow Valley*, easing the shadow of world catastrophe into the small talk of neighbours and pets. Anne's young family are joined by the motherless brood at the nearby manse. Her own children are shadowy, and she herself is reduced to some cliché gestures ("hands clasped before her") and "tag" descriptions (shining grey eyes). A newcomer joins the range of types: Mary Vance, an orphan, but a brassy, skinny, pale-eyed, pugnacious one. The widowed minister, dreamily abstracted from his children's needs, is firmly realized also. And how L. M. Montgomery must have enjoyed "naming" the children of this Presbyterian minister: Jeremy and Carlyle, turbulent Faith and gentle Una!

The play of names in *Rilla of Ingleside* is thought-provoking too. It is Walter, named after Anne's father, who is killed — the father dies again, in a sense. Marilla's namesake adopts a war-baby, Jims, while Jem, given up as dead, lives again at the end. Nan and Di, the twins, are "off-stage" most of the time although the notion of twins still seems to press on L. M. Montgomery's fancy.

The book makes an interesting contrast with *Anne of the Island*. Anne's daughter waits through a four-year period for her romance, just as the mother had done, but the inhibition is imposed from without, by war. In a little experiment with first-person point-of-view, Rilla recounts her waiting in her journal — a preview of the major method of the Emily Books which will come soon.

These three "Anne" books were brought out by the new publisher in a format similar to the earlier volumes. Their sales were excellent.

Trouble flared in 1920 when the former publisher, Page's of Boston, brought out a collection of early pieces, which had appeared years before as magazine sketches, under the title *Further Chronicles of Avonlea*. Their reasoning seems to have been that the author had owed them "refusal" on these stories. L. M. Montgomery indignantly protested against "piracy," and decided to sue for invasion of her rights. The suit dragged on for about nine years, wearying, sometimes embarrassing and humiliating, always irritating and distracting. This battle over the publishers' "right" to the book was important for professional writers. It stirred furious discussion in authors' associations, and spot-lighted the need for business acumen and a readiness to fight for due rewards. It revived all the old tensions over copyright and piracy which had so long plagued Canadian writers.

Of the book itself, L. M. Montgomery spoke slightly. But there are at least two aspects worth notice. First, a number of ghost stories in

the late Kipling manner reflect the author's interest in psychic phenomena and her ability to blend new ideas about extra-sensory perceptions with the old patterns of folk tale. Second, the "Western" sketch, "Tannis of the Flats," set in Prince Albert, and reminiscent of Bret Harte and Owen Wister, catches attention as a single use of that alien setting experienced briefly when Lucy Maud Montgomery visited her father in the 1880s.

The furore about her lawsuit increased her status among Canadian writers. She was in demand as a speaker at literary societies, and was still bombarded with letters and questions about her methods of working and the "originals" of Anne and of Green Gables.

In 1921 she had the rather unhappy experience of seeing a silent movie based on her book but distorting many elements in it. Her old contract with the Page Company gave her no royalties for "screen rights," and she had no control over the revision of the story for movie purposes. She particularly objected to the school-room scenes, in which the Stars and Stripes flew bravely over the P.E.I. school-house.

Perhaps the tension over rights to the products of her imagination, combined with this public focus on its processes, led L. M. Montgomery to a new subject. She went back again to the memory of her own girlhood, and began the story of a girl living between the world of fact and the world of words. "Emily" is a character whose joy and release consist of writing—first a letter journal to her dead father, then a set of sketches in her "Jimmy-books" (note-books offered by a sympathetic old cousin) and finally tales and poems, proffered to publishers.

The theme of a writer's ambition had been a sub-current in early "Anne" books. Now it becomes a major strand. In the three "Emily" books (*Emily of New Moon*, *Emily Climbs*, and *Emily's Quest*), chapters of Emily's journals reflect and intensify the third-person narrative sequence.

*Emily of New Moon* (1923) is an intriguing book even without this looking-glass effect. In it L. M. Montgomery moves powerfully into a mythical tale of girlhood. Names of people and places half-reveal and half-disguise the undercurrents of meaning and emotion. The little girl named Emily Byrd Starr comes from Maywood to the New Moon farm of her mother's people (the mother was named Juliet). Her false friend is Rhoda (rodent?), her true friend is Ilse (ipse?). Her first teacher is Miss Brownell (who destroys imagination), her second Mr. Carpenter (who, obviously, builds). Midway through the book a priest encourages her to "keep on" writing; but at Wyther Grange she meets a man named Priest—Dean Priest at that—the crippled "Jarback," her own dead father's friend, who brings her to life again, at the cost of possessing her soul. None of this is obtrusive, but it adds a dimension of interest to the surface story. That story is an intriguing though unpretentious version of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, a careful recreation of those "spots of time" in which the creative imagination is nurtured. It clarifies the directions of a growing child's fantasy-life. The story is climaxed by a mysterious vision in which Emily's mind, in delirium, fuses three bits of memory,

and prophetically "sees" a hidden truth (the "real" story of Ilse's lost mother). This prophetic second sight restores Ilse to her estranged father, by clearing the dead mother's reputation. It is an effective fable of art. It is also a good solution of the double plot, a fusion of Emily's "real" life among her friends and her life as poetic creator.

Having opened the doors of memory so far, L. M. Montgomery pushed them wider—perilously wider—in her sequel. *Emily Climbs* (1925) recreates the tone of a teen-aged girl's view of life: her sense of being misunderstood and repressed, her obsessive interest in her own identity. Emily had gone to "Shrewsbury," to the town where shrewish Aunt Ruth waits to curb, censor and belittle her. Yet in spite of never being understood Emily manages to enjoy, innocently, most forbidden pleasures. This fantasy of adolescence is a precursor of *Catcher in the Rye*, *A Separate Peace* and the whole fashionable swarm of such books. It expresses the romance and dreaminess of adolescence, as well as the arrogance, self-pity and inhibitions we have been taught ruefully to recognize. The material is awkwardly handled: the structure and style seem to have some of the clumsiness and unsureness of the adolescent. But the book is a pioneering entry into a difficult and important area.

It is no accident that L. M. Montgomery's first mature attempt at an adult novel came as an interruption of the "Emily" series. *The Blue Castle* (1926) was an effort to "climb" past the stereotypes of girls' books.

In 1925 the permanence of her appeal was marked by the beginning of a re-issue of her work in a "uniform edition" (Harrap, 1925-1935). Her family life had made a welcome shift, from Leaskdale in the rather remote Uxbridge area, to the larger town of Norval, near Toronto, and in the centre of the earlier settled regions of western central Ontario. Here Mr. Macdonald hoped for an easing of his duties, since his health was not good. The Macdonalds' sons were now boys of thirteen and ten. Perhaps the vigorous reality of their lives suggested a vivid alternative to the retrospective dreams of remembered childhood.

*The Blue Castle* is energetic and tough. It is an amazingly blunt story of a frustrated woman's attempt to find a real life in defiance of family tabus and conventions. It has a Cinderella plot, but the settings and characters mark a definite break from cliché. The story begins with a pompous family dinner party, which may echo Galsworthy but which certainly precedes *Jalna* (1927). It moves to "the verge of up-back," to the derelict home of a drunken no-good, and from there to a roaring barn-dance brawl at Chidley's Corners. Exactly half-way through, Valancy (what a nice name for an independent Canadian heroine!) accepts joyfully the fact of her love for the mystery man from Muskoka, and moves with him to an enchanted island. In the second half of the book the author piles up improbable plot twists with jaunty unconcern, without losing the sardonic realism of her portraits of the family group left behind in "civilization." Valancy's Dionysian revolt is blurred a little by the third plot thread—her devotion to the romantic nature-writings of "John Foster." But as one young reader says, "you can skip the John Foster stuff," and keep a book with real vitality: a fairy-tale set to a jazz

tempo.

The reviewers were not impressed. Professor Desmond Pacey some years later summarized the contemporary reaction: "all the weaknesses of the Anne books and none of their redeeming charm." L. M. Montgomery had an over-developed sensitivity to reviews. She had an old habit of quoting reams of critical comments to her friends, to her correspondents, to lecture audiences. Good or bad, she found reviews very important. In *The Blue Castle*, reviewers had missed the special quality she was aiming for, or had not found it impressive.

In 1927, *Emily's Quest* marked the author's retreat from her experimental venture. This is another "girls' book," in magazine style. The familiar characters are re-assembled, re-aligned, and finally sorted out into romantic pairs. "Jarback Priest," after threatening to become a distinct person, diminishes and fades as conventional poetic romance takes over. The book makes an interesting pair with *The Blue Castle*, so different in tone.

In 1929 another gifted fantasy-child was added to the established pattern, in *Magic for Marigold*.

Then came one more attempt to break the mold. *A Tangled Web* (1931) is an effort at mosaic method in plotting a story for grown-ups. *Aunt Becky Began It* was the English title of this novel—Aunt Becky being the old-witch character who dangles a family treasure before the Dark-Penhallow clan and sets its members to weaving a number of webs in hope of the heirloom. This folk-tale motif of treasure and hag-guardian has recurred in almost every one of L. M. Montgomery's novels. The novel "up-dates" the Island girls, now lipsticked, silkstockinged, bobbed, and given to small swearings. The author offers a cheap "come-on" in the opening paragraph when she implies that we will learn how Big Sam Dark "learned to appreciate the beauty of the unclothed female form." But in spite of this minor naughtiness the stories are still the conventional tales of "Avonlea," not really lifted into any newly mature vision.

The author had now an impressive list of still-popular books to her credit. A new generation was "growing up on Anne," and the production of new books had settled to a rhythm of one novel every alternate year. A new movie version of *Anne of Green Gables* was in the making (to be released in 1934). A number of tours of Canada, east (every summer) and west, had shown the author how universally popular her books continued to be, and how strong the demand for "more about the Island."

During these years at Norval she added two more to her list of seventeen books: *Pat of Siver Bush* (1933) and *Mistress Pat* (1935). "Pat" is a convincing child in her deep attachment to her home and her dread of change and chance. "Old Judy Plum," the Irish housekeeper who watches the child's initiation into maturity, becomes wearisome in her stage-Irish mannerisms, but she delighted (and still delights) young readers. Dialect humour holds its appeal for children.

L. M. Montgomery's own "children" were now young men ready for university. Perhaps the give-and-take of their boyhood life together was now far enough distanced in the author's memory to have become accessible for re-creation. Such a theory of the way her imagination worked, at a distance in time from experienced fact, might account for the new strength in the "Pat" books of studies of family life. Brother-and-sister relations, not well handled or handled with false sentimentality in *Rainbow Valley* and *Rilla of Ingleside*, are better managed now, with new variety and a sometimes rueful realism.

Before leaving Norval, L. M. Montgomery found time also to collaborate on a compilation of lives of *Courageous Women* (1934). The list of women includes Pauline Johnson, Marshall Saunders, Madame Albani, and Catharine Parr Traill, along with non-Canadian "heroines" such as Joan of Arc, Florence Nightingale and Helen Keller. The collaborators were Mabel Burns McKinley and Marian Keith (Mrs. Donald MacGregor). Mrs. MacGregor had been a treasured friend since 1911, the year both young women, newly established authors and newly married brides of ministers, had met at a Toronto reception given by the Women's Press Club. It was a friendship that perhaps exerted unfortunate pressures on L. M. Montgomery to conform to the conventions of romantic escapist fiction of the moral uplift sort.

The Macdonald family moved to Toronto in 1935 when Mr. Macdonald retired from the active ministry. Life centred around the activities of the two university students, Chester in law and Stuart in medicine. The Women's Press Club, the Canadian Author's Association, and other groups of professional and amateur artists absorbed time and energy. So did the business of arrangements with publishers, and the still voluminous correspondence with friends, relations and readers. She was herself an omnivorous reader of classics, mystery stories, best sellers, magazines — anything and everything.

In this year of flattering official recognition, 1935, L. M. Montgomery appeared on the King's Silver Jubilee List as an officer in the Order of the British Empire. She was also elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and Letters. The Institut des Lettres et des Arts of France made her a member, and later awarded her a silver medal for literary style.

She set to work again in her new home on Riverside Drive in Toronto, to rebuild the pattern of plotting, writing, and revising, all dove-tailed into the daily chores of housekeeping. Two last "Anne" books were to be written: *Anne of Windy Poplars* (1936) and *Anne of Ingleside* (1939). These stories are concocted to "fill in the gaps" in Anne's story: the years spent in waiting for Gilbert to finish his medical course (*Windy Poplars*) and the years when her children were small (*Ingleside*). Both books have a warmed-over flavour. The people are "characters" revived from earlier models. Neither book has distinction in structure. The slang is an odd mixture of phrases of the 1930s and the remembered cadences of the 1900-1910 period. Even "Susan" has lost her gossipy vigour. Anne's children are quaint and cute and not very believable.

But there remained one further flame of creativity. One last girl would be added to the roll-call of convincing heroines. *Jane of Lantern Hill* (1937) begins in Toronto. It is a Toronto of dreary grey mansions and more dismal filling-stations, family dinners, and ashy back-yards. But Jane goes every summer from this Toronto to join her father on Prince Edward Island. Eventually she draws her golden mother with her, back to the Island. This small and poignant version of Orpheus and Eurydice ends in pastoral reunion and fulfilment. It is equally vivid in its Island paradise, where Jane keeps house for her father, and in its Toronto hell, where Jane quakes before Grandmother (who calls her "Victoria"). If, as Professor Northrop Frye says, literature is "two dreams, a wish-fulfilment dream and an anxiety dream, that are focussed together, like a pair of glasses, and become a fully conscious vision," this last book stakes a claim as literature. Not just "children's literature," either, for both Jane's anxiety and her dream are successful metaphors of adult psychic realities. Jane's island paradise is deeply meaningful and satisfying; and not only for children.

L. M. Montgomery was increasingly conscious of her role as mythmaker. She talked mystically about "the Island" as a place of the soul. Asked to contribute an article on P.E.I. to a memorial volume on Canada, designed for presentation by the Canadian Pacific Railway to King George and Queen Elizabeth, L. M. Montgomery sidestepped the expected conventions of travel-book descriptions. She wrote of the Island's beauty, its reality, its peace; the feeling it gave, in "dimming landscape...and long, white-sand beach and murmuring ocean...homestead lights and the old fields tilled by dead and gone generations who loved them," of being "home."

By 1939, the life of L. M. Montgomery was far from paradisaical. Her health was no longer good, and her spirits very depressed. She was deeply distressed by the coming war. Her husband's ill health was a great worry. She was in correspondence with the Ryerson Press, which planned a Canadian edition of her earlier works. Ryerson had been agents for the old Page Company of Boston; now they were bringing the early books out again in Canada. There would be no change in the royalty arrangements. The whole business revived L. M. Montgomery's resentment over what she considered the exploitation of her efforts by the publishers. Two movie versions of *Anne* had been made, and two three-act plays based on *Anne* appeared in 1937, one by Alice Chadwicke, one by Wilbur Braun. Both, issued by French in New York, brought no returns to L. M. Montgomery, for she had sold all "rights" to dramatic versions for a lump sum back in 1907. She brooded also over the "piracy" suits she had suffered through in the twenties. Illness and depression grew together. She wrote to a correspondent who had paid her a tribute in 1940, "It always gives me pleasure to hear that [my books] have given a little help or enjoyment to my readers. Certainly in the kind of world that this has become we need all the help we can get."

L. M. Montgomery died April 24, 1942. She was buried in Cavendish, in

the loveliness  
Of cool, far hill, and long remembered shore,  
Finding in it a sweet forgetfulness  
Of all that hurt before.

Her husband died a year later. In Prince Edward Island, a stone monument has been erected at the entrance to Cavendish National Park, and the old "Green Gables" house, near L. M. Montgomery's childhood home, stands as a shrine to her memory and a recognition of the continuing reality of "Anne."

Her death brought a wave of retrospective articles, mostly nostalgic. Her old correspondent, Ephraim Weber, prepared two articles for the *Dalhousie Review*, "L. M. Montgomery as a Letter Writer," October, 1942, and "L. M. Montgomery's 'Anne,'" April, 1944. They remained the major serious contribution to knowledge of the author for many years. Subsequent critics of Canadian literature—such as Arthur Phelps in *Canadian Writers* (1951), and Desmond Pacey in *Creative Writing* (1952), were patronizing and casual. They spoke of her naïve plotting, her whimsy, her sentiment. Hilda M. Ridley's biography, *The Story of L. M. Montgomery* (1956), blurred some details, and over-emphasized the childhood background of the author. Wilfrid Eggleston in his graceful edition (1960) of *The Green Gables Letters (From L. M. Montgomery to Ephraim Weber, 1905-1909)*, has done much to restore our sense of the wisdom and wit of this "lively and attractive personality."

Her established audience—girls between ten and fourteen—continues to read and love the L. M. Montgomery books. But she may also lay increasing claim to our attention as adult critics. The books have an intensity because they *were* written as "children's books." The same kind of sesame that unlocked Lewis Carroll's inhibitions and let him write the classic of fantasy and repression that we now see in *Alice*—that same magic releasing power seems to have operated with the Canadian, late-Victorian, provincial spinster. Writing "for children," she could re-enact the rituals of childhood. Recreating her own remembered yearnings and anxieties, she could create a myth of the hesitant desires and worries of the virginal years.

Modern psychology explains some of the hidden power of L. M. Montgomery's books, especially for adolescent girls.<sup>2</sup> Most teen-aged girls find it hard to get along with their mothers, the psychologists say, yet not daring consciously to dislike the mother, they are torn by mixed emotions of admiration, rivalry, dependence, hostility, all operating at a subconscious level. The heroines of L. M. Montgomery have no mothers. They do have aunts and grandmothers (who can safely be hated). Indeed, they usually have a range of aunts, some restrictive, some permissive. The adolescent reader can discriminate ambivalent feelings by loving one aunt (mother-substitute), while hating another. Also, in adolescence there is a normal intensity of feeling for the father, a feeling that must be outgrown or re-directed, but that is very powerful in the transitional stage between family relations and extra-familial ones, and correlates with the transition from homosexual to



heterosexual devotion. In most of L. M. Montgomery's books, the father, safely distanced by death, stirs deep feelings of attachment (usually disapproved of by the aunts or grandmothers).

Other tenets of the psychologists who study adolescence can similarly be illustrated from the Montgomery books. "Girls may feel unconscious jealousy of boys": in the novels girls replace boys, as Anne replaced the asked-for boy orphan, as Valancy replaced her mother's desired son. Many times, also, names are used to suggest crossing of boundaries: "Peter" in *The Quarantine* is a girl; "Bev," the boy-narrator in the Story Girl series has an ambivalent name, as have "Phil", "Jo", Jamesina, Pat, and a long list of others. The theory would be that reading such tales gives young girls an outlet for their fantasies of changing sex. Another tenet: "The adolescent longs for yet dreads the coming of physical passion." No doubt this accounts for the pleasure girls find in reading the long, long sequence of tales in which consummation of a romance is suspended, usually by some illogical tabu. Item: "The ending of virginity may be symbolically accepted in dreams, as a prelude to reality." Re-reading the L. M. Montgomery books with even a reserved acceptance of Freudian symbolism would surprise most of us! Once again, the theory is that such gentle, sublimated acceptance into the young reader's consciousness can be a healthy form of gradual adjustment. Such a Freudian re-reading, besides increasing our interest in the "Anne" and "Emily" books, may lead to a reevaluation of *The Blue Castle*, where many of the suppressed themes are directly stated.

The basic assumption in this reevaluation is that L. M. Montgomery was probably not conscious of the forces she was releasing. She was, however, honest enough to use the patterns her memory suggested. Furthermore, she was a good enough craftsman to lift the stories from the level of clinical confession to that of archetypal statement.

We may guess, also, that this author was increasingly conscious of the basic equation she had established, almost by chance, in her first successful novel. "The Island" is adolescence. And Adolescence, that time of intense dreaming, of romantic yearning and disturbing hostility, remains as a part of every consciousness. Encircled by the mature sands of logic, pragmatism, utilitarianism and conformity, the island of youth exists for us and in us still. Perhaps art can be the channel by which we rediscover the island. L. M. Montgomery's world of poetry, virginity, and pantheism still opens for the adult reader the way back to his own world of young realization: he "wakes, to dream again."

This brings us to the final claim of L. M. Montgomery on our attention and respect. She is the novelist for the bookish child, the word-conscious child to whom she gives reassurance about a sense of the magic of 'naming.' She knows that words are her tool, and have been so ever since as a child, by naming, she made her own Island in time.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This article is reprinted, by permission, from *The Clear Spirit*, ed.

Mary Quayle Innis (University of Toronto Press, 1966), pp. 198-219. The endnotes are an addition to the original.

<sup>2</sup>*The Road To Yesterday*, published earlier this year by McGraw - Hill Ryerson, presents further very interesting grounds for comment on the psychological aspects of L. M. Montgomery's vision.

*Elizabeth Waterston, an Associate Editor of CCL and Chairman of the English Department at the University of Guelph, has written widely on Canadian literature. Two of her books are Composition for Canadian Universities and Survey: A Short History of Canadian Literature.*