

L.M. Montgomery and “The Alpine Path, so hard, so steep”

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The biographical research of the past decade has revealed a new dimension of Lucy Maud Montgomery's character. Mollie Gillen's biography, *The wheel of things*¹ takes for its title a phrase from Kipling which Gillen sees as epitomizing the destructive surrender to convention Montgomery felt compelled to make, both as an author and as a minister's wife. Montgomery's intimate letters to G.B. MacMillan² confirm this interpretation. Montgomery portrays herself as a victim of severe depression throughout her life. She seems to regard the writing of the *Anne of Green Gables* sequels as unwelcome drudgery, and is increasingly oppressed by family difficulties. Montgomery's final letters to MacMillan pour out the agony that can no longer be restrained. The following passage (the complete text of a postcard) is representative:

Am no better dear friend & never will be. You do not know the blows that have fallen on my life for years. I tried to hide them from my friends. I feel my mind is going.³

Emily of New Moon (1923), *Emily climbs* (1925), and *Emily's quest* (1927) — can be read as the fictionalized confession of a troubled personality alternating between confidence in creativity and despairing self-doubt. Before the first of these novels was completed, Montgomery confided to a friend that Emily was an autobiographical character:

“Emily” will be, in a sense, more autobiographical than any of my other books. People were never right in saying I was “Anne” but, *in some respects*, they will be right if they write me down as Emily.⁴

Critics have subsequently remarked upon the abundant parallels between Montgomery's literary career and the “Alpine Path” climbed by Emily. The comparison extends to deeper matters of the spirit, as is indicated by the juxtaposition of Montgomery's January 8, 1908 letter to MacMillan with a passage from Emily's diary in *Emily's quest*:

Do you take the “blues” too . . . I cannot fully describe these experiences . . . They are *dreadful*, far worse than physical pain. In so far as I can express my condition in words, I feel a great and awful *weariness* — not of body or mind but of *feeling*, coupled with

a strange dread of the future — *any* future, even a happy one — nay, a happy one most of all for in this strange mood it seems to me that to be happy would require more *emotional energy* than I will possess.⁵

Gloom settles on my soul. I can't describe the feeling. It is dreadful — worse than any actual pain. In so far as I can express it in words I feel a great and awful weariness — not of body or brain but of *feeling*, coupled with a haunting dread of the future — *any* future — even a happy one — nay, a happy one most of all, for in this strange mood it seems to me that to be happy would require more effort — more buoyancy than I shall possess.⁶

The duplication of phrasing in passages written more than a decade apart is astounding. Montgomery was in the habit of making one set of reflections serve more than one correspondent, and in this instance one must suspect that she attributed her innermost feelings to Emily by referring either to the original letter or to her personal diaries. In any event, the passages certainly demonstrate Montgomery's sense of identification with her protagonist.

Emily's story does not always take such a melancholy turn. Indeed, it follows the *pattern* of Montgomery's life in being on the surface a story of triumph. Emily finds a place in her family and community despite the opposition of disagreeable relatives and narrow-minded fellow citizens; she succeeds as an author, first with money-making potboilers and then with more artistic works, despite negative reactions from both family and publishers; she achieves happiness in love despite malicious attempts to separate her from her partner. Yet throughout all three books, as much emphasis is placed on the obstacles to success (both external and within Emily herself) as upon the ultimate victories.

Emily of New Moon concentrates on Emily's integration within the Murray family, and on her initial attempts to make herself into an artist. As the story of an isolated individual finding a new self-definition within a family, *Emily of New Moon* superficially resembles *Anne of Green Gables*: in both cases an orphan learns how to gain the affection she desperately craves, and in return transforms the character of her guardians. Yet, in several respects, the process of mutual adjustment is more complex and troubled in *Emily* than in the earlier novel. Anne quickly wins Matthew Cuthbert's heart, and although her conquest of Marilla is more gradual, it is evident from an early stage that Marilla has the warmth of heart to respond to Anne's charm. Emily has an ally corresponding to Matthew in Cousin Jimmy Murray, but in Elizabeth and Laura Murray, she has to contend with the two sides of Marilla's personality split into separate characters: Laura is all sympathy but ineffectual, and Elizabeth, the dominant spirit in the New Moon household, is cold, moralistic and self-righteous. Marilla's increasing acceptance of Anne is clearly indicated before the middle of *Anne*, whereas the turning-point of Emily's relationship with Elizabeth does not oc-

cur until *Emily* is nearly at its conclusion. When Elizabeth chooses to read unflattering descriptions of herself contained in Emily's confessional "letters" to her dead father, the resulting confrontation is presented at a level of seriousness altogether lacking in *Anne*:

For the moment they faced each other, not as aunt and niece, not as child or adult, but as two human beings each with hatred for the other in her heart — Elizabeth Murray, tall and austere and thin-lipped; Emily Starr, white of face, her eyes pools of black flame.⁷

For much of *Emily of New Moon*, our heroine is not even certain she wants to be accepted as a Murray. Here again, she differs from Anne, who has nothing but bitter memories to serve as an alternative to life with the Cuthberts. Emily can think of herself as a Starr, her father's child, and it is not until the aftermath of her quarrel with Elizabeth that she gives up the allegiance to her father implicit in her habit of writing letters to him.⁸

Douglas Starr leaves a lasting imprint on his daughter in another respect: he constitutes her first image of the life of a writer. He was "a poor young journalist, with nothing in the world but his pen and ambition" (15) when he dared to elope with Emily's mother, a Murray, and thereby earned the Murray permanent enmity. Speaking to Emily on his deathbed, he has to admit that "from a worldly point of view I've certainly been a failure" (17), but takes consolation in the idea that "You have my gift . . . you will succeed where I have failed" (13). The prophecy proves to be correct, partly because Emily is determined to play out the role her father has cast for her. The image of the artist as an alienated outcast, financially insecure and scornfully regarded as a failure, is established through the character of Douglas Starr in the trilogy's opening pages, and is never completely abandoned in the nine hundred pages that follow.

Emily seeks out among her peers those with the talents and inclinations that complement the Starr flair for the artistic. Anne, it will be recalled, is quite content to claim Diana Barry as a "kindred spirit," even though in playing with the very conventional Diana, Anne has to "furnish most of the imagination."⁹ Emily's friends, on the other hand, all display an abundance of inventiveness in their pursuits — Teddy Kent as an artist, Ilse Burnley as an elocutionist, Perry Miller as a debater. Emily's contention that she and her friends constitute a "talented [*sic*] crowd" (159) is justified. Diana Barry serenely accepts her due as a princess of Avonlea society, whereas Emily's friends, like Emily herself, have family crosses to bear: Teddy has a neurotic mother who cannot abide any competition for his love; Ilse has a father who identifies her with the imagined sins of her dead mother; Perry has an obnoxious aunt, and comes from socially unacceptable origins in Stovepipe Town. The emotional difficulties attendant upon these circumstances stand in the way of general

popularity in the miniature society of the primary school; Emily and her friends therefore make themselves into a bohemian society-in-exile, with meetings held in the Tansy Patch, an area “most people” considered “a bare, lonely, neglected place,” but which Emily thought “fascinating” (127). Romantic symbols of creativity abound in the narrator’s picture of Emily’s happiest hours there, spent in contemplation rather than activity “in the mystery and enchantment of the borderland ’tween light and dark” when each child was “anchored in some secret port of dreams” (128).

As the novel proceeds, Emily builds up a network of adult patrons to go along with her circle of gifted friends. Each of the adults also bears the marks of the physical or psychic wound. Cousin Jimmy, who supplies Emily with encouragement and notebooks, was pushed down as well as a child by his angry sister Elizabeth — an allegory of the triumph of conventional determination over sensitivity. His consequent mental impairment has made him, except in unusual moments, ineffective as a counterweight to Elizabeth, but he recovers self-esteem by portraying himself as the abused artist: “Folks say I’ve never been quite right since — but they only say that because I’m a poet” (69). He is depicted as an attractive example of a Romantic type, the wise fool. The next adult to perceive Emily’s ability is Father Cassidy, a witty Irishman in much better mental condition than Cousin Jimmy, but a priest very much aware of the deep distrust with which he is viewed by his Protestant neighbours. Dean Priest, Emily’s distant relative by marriage, is scorned by his own family because he is a hunchback; he “cared for nothing save books” (275), and, initially at least, offers Emily the gift of sympathetic understanding combined with broad literary knowledge. By the end of the novel, Emily comes under the guidance of a new teacher, Francis Carpenter, a brilliant student turned alcoholic failure who “tried it [poetry] myself once” (302).

Ranged against those who support Emily’s writing are those who seek to suppress it: Emily’s aunts, who combine lack of taste with a Puritanical disapproval of art, and Emily’s first teacher, Miss Brownell, who objects to poetry as an assertion of individuality. In a significant structural pattern of the trilogy, recurrent strong challenges to Emily’s artistic soul, from an enemy of art or from fate, pose a direct threat to the continued existence of her will to create. This sequence of episodes begins with the news, obtusely communicated, of her father’s impending death. The prospect of his death is so horrifying to Emily that “it couldn’t be written about” (11), and it threatens the total extinction of “the flash” (or moment of creative illumination). It is a distinctive aspect of Montgomery’s outlook that Emily saves herself, both in this period of spiritual testing and in another such crisis (a violent argument with Miss Brownell) by drawing strength from her ancestors: “her heritage of endurance” (11) in living with grief and “the Murray look” (172) of fierce resolution in facing down Miss Brownell.

If the oppressive events of real life can threaten to snuff out Emily's artistic flame, writing itself can sometimes counteract the pains of reality. Over and over again, Emily assuages the humiliation of a public defeat by retreating to the private world of her imagination. Her capacity to weave the distorted elements of reality into a healing fantasy often gives a necessary boost to morale in her vulnerable early years. Moreover, it is an indication of the talent Montgomery ascribes to her heroine that in the process of working out her tales, Emily moves from simple wish-fulfillment to a genuine absorption in the imagined world. An interesting example of this principle occurs very early in the novel. Emily has overheard herself being disparaged by the entire Murray family:

She *couldn't* bear all the pain and shame that were burning in her heart. Then her eyes fell on the old yellow account book on her little table. A minute later Emily was curled up on her bed, Turk-fashion, writing eagerly in the old book. (43)

So far, fiction has simply cured Emily of her distress. But the entry into a creative world is suggested immediately afterwards, in the paradox of artistry that "she forgot the Murrays although she was writing about them."

The seriousness of Emily's self-image as a writer is particularly evident in *Emily of New Moon's* final pages. Emily is determined not to give up her art, even when ordered to do so by her aunt: "Oh, I must write. . . It is *in* me. I I can't help it" (317). Emily's consciousness of the similar dedication of her artist friends strengthens her resolve: "Teddy can't help making pictures and Ilse can't help reciting, and I can't help writing" (318).

Montgomery also chooses to make Emily's compulsion to write the subject of the novel's concluding scene, in a chapter revealingly entitled "Emily's great moment." She nervously submits her work to Mr. Carpenter, a stern judge. He acidly denounces the failings of her poetry; however, like both Father Cassidy and Dean Priest before him, he is less concerned with the modest achievement of the present than with the character of the artist: "I think there's *something* trying to speak through you — but you'll have to make yourself a fit instrument for it" (348). He cross-examines her on her basic motivation, and only when she assures him that apart from loving to write she feels she *has* to write does he utter his benediction, urging her to "go on — climb!" (350).

Father Cassidy had already advised Emily to "keep on" (210), but the metaphor of ascent is given a more prominent place in the novel, as it seems to have had a more prominent place in Montgomery's own imagination. Montgomery had already chosen *The alpine path* as the title of her autobiographical sketch (1917), and the phrase is mentioned innumerable times throughout the Emily trilogy. Its source is an unremarkable poem called "The Fringed Gentian," which Dean sends Emily (in reality, Montgomery had found the poem as a child¹⁰):

Then 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 honoured fame
And write upon its shining scroll
A woman's humble name. (300-301)

Mediocre as it is, the poem inspires an immediate advent of “the flash,” and a vow, taken at the age of twelve, to follow its direction. This response is not inappropriate, for the poem does provide an external sanction for Emily's own guiding principles: the reliance upon Nature, the need for determination, confidence that literary success constitutes a worthy goal. The desire for “honoured fame” suggests a craving for recognition which is not to be granted within Emily's immediate surroundings; the concluding line is a reminder of the special difficulties, evident in Emily's own career, faced by the female climber upon Parnassus.

Emily climbs, the second volume of the trilogy, shows Emily making considerable progress along the literary slopes. Her art becomes more disciplined and less frequently arises out of the need to neutralize distressing events; childish forms of romance are abandoned; magazine acceptances appear in increasing quantity and accompanied by larger payments. This success is achieved, however, in the face of obstacles every bit as discouraging as those encountered in *Emily of New Moon*.

Emily climbs chronicles the protagonist's secondary education in Shrewsbury, a village far removed from the amusing quaintness of Avonlea. As its name suggests, Shrewsbury is dominated by the conventional and the censorious: when a snowstorm compels Emily to spend a night with her artistic friends in an abandoned farmhouse, she suffers ostracism as an immediate consequence. Emily's humiliation is so great that she cannot even find consolation in writing: “Neither could she write out her misery and so rid herself of it. . . The flash write came now — never would come again.”¹¹ The extinction of the literary spark is not permanent, but the episode shows the vulnerability to malice of Emily's sensitive temperament.

If community pressures on Emily are greater in *Emily climbs* than in *Emily of New Moon*, family hostility does not abate. The slavery the Murrays seek to impose upon the artistic imagination is most dramatically revealed when Elizabeth seeks to prohibit Emily from writing fiction while she is at school in Shrewsbury. The narrator intervenes to underline the fact that Elizabeth is acting as a representative of her clan:

The dead-and-gone Murrays looked down accusingly from their dark frames. *They* had no sympathy with flashes and Jimmy-books and Alpine paths — with the pursuit of unwon, alluring divinities. (80)

Faced with such implacable opposition to art, Emily has to rebel to preserve her very being, and she does fight back, vowing not to go to Shrewsbury under such unacceptable terms. A compromise is reached, but Emily is then compelled to board with her suspicious and mean-spirited Aunt Ruth throughout her Shrewsbury years. Aunt Ruth manifests the Murray distrust of culture when she pounces with glee on Emily's rejections, and forbids her, on the night of the performance, to act in a play.

Even the support Emily might hope to draw from her companions in art is diminished in *Emily climbs*, as the tangled relationships of adolescence replace the firm bonds of childhood. Of Emily's receptive audience in *Emily of New Moon*, only Mr. Carpenter remains as a genuine critic, sympathetic yet demanding.

The problems just described arise from external sources, though they require emotional adjustments on Emily's part. A more fundamental subject of this volume is the internal self-division from which Emily suffers. In *Emily of New Moon*, becoming an artist was not, on the whole, incompatible with becoming a Murray; in *Emily climbs*, however, the necessity for Emily to make painful choices becomes evident.

The inner drive to escape the suffocating confinement of a conventional milieu is a common subject in novels of the *bildungsroman* type. In *Emily climbs*, Shrewsbury and Aunt Ruth are certainly all one could wish as a justification for shaking the red dust of the Island from one's feet. Yet Emily does not go; indeed, in the major scene of the novel, she consciously rejects an opportunity to go. In taking this decision, she makes a gesture similar to Anne's loyalty to green gables, but Emily does not face the tangible crisis that overwhelms the Cuthberts; hers is a totally voluntary act of renunciation. This episode gives *Emily climbs* its greatest interest. Though this novel, more than its companions, often seems shapeless, it ultimately turns into a meditation upon inner freedom, particularly the freedom of the artist.

The choice is created for Emily when a Shrewsbury native who has become a successful New York editor offers to introduce her to the literary life of the big city. Until the moment of choice, Emily develops a sense of identification with and loyalty towards the Murray tradition, all the while preserving, with equal passion, the sense of detachment, the aloneness, of the artist. The intrinsic contradictions in Emily's values are revealed in a passage a few chapters before the appropriately-named Miss Royal arrives with her autocratic summons to literary glory. Emily reproaches herself on one page for confiding too much in Ilse because "it is not a Murray tradition to turn your soul inside out" (210);

in the same diary entry, however, she complains bitterly about the obstacles to freedom:

“Nobody is free — never, except just for a few brief moments now and then, when the flash comes. . . All the rest of our years we are slaves to something — traditions — conventions — ambitions — *relations*. (211-12)

Emily’s rejection of the temptation offered by Miss Royal appears at first sight to be a vote in favour of the Philistine Murray tradition, and even against literary aspiration. Miss Royal argues, plausibly enough, that “you mustn’t waste your life here. . . .you must have. . . the training that only a great city can give” (288). The basis for Emily’s response seems clear enough: “I belong to New Moon — I stay among my own people” (297). Yet on close examination, Emily’s decision is not as unequivocal as it seems. Miss Royal offers herself, not just as a friendly adviser, but as a surrogate guardian: “I’ll look after you as well as Aunt Elizabeth herself could do” (289). Indeed, the repeated suggestion that Miss Royal has a penchant for attractive girls implies the interest of a sublimated Lesbian as well as substitute mother and frustrated author. In short, Emily has reason to suspect that Miss Royal would pose a greater threat than any Murray to her creative and personal independence. Just before Emily makes her final decision, her meditations show that she has come to feel that freedom and stimulus to the imagination are to be associated with New Moon, not New York:

Would the Wind Woman come to her in the crowded city streets? Could she be like Kipling’s cat there? “And I wonder if I’ll ever have the flash in New York,” she thought wistfully. (296)

It is appropriate that Emily should think of Kipling’s cat at this crucial moment, for she has already used this literary animal as a symbol of her need for independence. The allusion is to “The cat that walked by himself,” from *Just so stories*; it is necessary to recall the fable briefly in order to evaluate its significance for Emily. The Cat desires the comforts of cave life, and yet will not give up his separateness. After a series of tough negotiations with the Woman, he agrees to provide needed services, and gains the privileges he desires. But he continues to insist on his lack of attachment to humanity, and at the end the narrator affirms his victory:

But when he has done that, and between times, and when the moon gets up and night comes, he is the Cat that walks by himself, and all places are alike to him. Then he goes out to the Wet Wild Woods or up the Wet Wild Trees or on the Wet Wild Roofs, waving his wild tail and walking by his wild lone.¹²

Much of Emily's character and behaviour can be understood in the light of the Kipling passage. Like the Cat, Emily has a need to make an alliance with human society; like the Cat, she brings benefits with her coming. But she is resentful of attacks upon her freedom, and remains faithful (like the Cat in the quoted passage) to a kinship with Nature in its untamed aspect.

Emily is given to associating herself with the Cat as a means of bolstering her identity when it is under attack from the Murrays. In the aftermath of the scene in which Aunt Elizabeth outlaws fiction, Emily defines her consciousness of being different from a Murray:

"I'm like Kipling's cat — I walk by my wild lone and wave my wild tail where so it pleases me. That's why the Murrays look askance at me. They think I should only run with the pack." (86)

The same allusion is used later on when Emily finds herself in disgrace with the Murrays yet again:

"I hate to go mincing through life, afraid to take a single long step for fear somebody is watching. I want to "wave my wild tail and walk by my wild lone." (233-34)

In an introspective passage of a letter to Weber, Montgomery reveals that Emily's emotional identification with Kipling's cat springs from her own feeling:

I have generally been considered a "good mixer" myself — but I am *not*. I am only an excellent imitation of one — compelled to play the part by the circumstances of my existence. In reality I detest "good mixers" and despise myself for aping them. . . . The only people I ever knew who were really worth while were cats who walked by themselves, rejoicing in their own peculiar brand of cathood and never pretending to be Maltese if they were tortoise shell.¹³

The vehement tone of this passage and the image it develops, as much as its content, are indications that Emily's creator had very much at heart her protagonist's struggle to assert independence in the face of the circumstances of her existence.

Emily's quest, the third volume of the trilogy, explores the consequences of Emily's decision to wave her wild tail in *New Moon*. Emily is not, however, allowed in the end to walk by her wild lone; the novel concludes with the marriage, not exactly a surprise to the reader, between Emily and Teddy Kent. Though *Emily's quest* is more tightly knit than *Emily climbs*, and contains much psychological interest, it subordinates Emily as artist to Emily as lover, and thereby disappoints some of the expectations aroused by the earlier books.

Yet there are some episodes and introspective passages in which Emily's

dedication to her craft returns with the former seriousness. For example, the effects of a diseased love upon creativity are dramatized when Dean Priest deliberately condemns Emily's newly written first novel in order to claim her undivided heart. Montgomery underlines the magnitude of the evil inherent in this design by having Emily burn her manuscript "in such an anguish of regret that she could not endure it" (61) and then blunder into a fall that nearly costs her life: physical danger symbolizes the danger to the soul. When Emily recovers and forces herself to contemplate marriage with Dean, he wins an apparent victory in that she temporarily turns against writing; it is only after she frees herself from the incubus of Dean that the "miracle" (116) of a return to creativity occurs.

After this crisis has been resolved, Emily is finally able to reap the benefits of her long apprenticeship to art. A second novel is accepted by a very prominent publisher. Within her family, Emily is finally forgiven for being a writer: "It was better to have won her standing with the New Moon folks than with the world" (209). The opinion of the literary judges Emily values most is also favourable: Dean is won over, and Miss Royal is forced to admit that "You could never have written *The moral of the rose* here [i.e. in New York]" (205). With this concession, Emily can feel that the decision to remain at New Moon, which she herself questions through much of *Emily's quest*, has been justified in literary as well as personal terms.

So, after many stumbles, Emily has climbed her Alpine Path. Nevertheless, for the young woman Montgomery portrays in *Emily's quest* (quite a different person from the girl of the two earlier novels), literary success alone is no guarantee of happiness. Montgomery has Emily avow throughout the final novel that Teddy means more to her than the Alpine Path. Just before Teddy returns to provide the necessary happy ending, Emily feels utterly abandoned:

Always alone. Love — friendship — gone forever. Nothing left but ambition. Emily settled herself resolutely down to work . . . She had some very glorious hours of inspiration and achievement. But mere beauty which had once satisfied her soul could not wholly satisfy it now. (253-54)

The character who had once resolved never to marry and to be "*wedded to my art*" (*EC*, 5; emphasis Montgomery's) has certainly changed her outlook.

Montgomery's own changes of heart about the trilogy, as revealed in her correspondence, help to explain the shift in direction one may detect in *Emily's quest*. Her mood while at work on *Emily of New Moon* is strongly enthusiastic: "I am enjoying work on the book immensely, which is a good sign."¹⁴ After she finishes that novel, she writes: "I had great pleasure in writing it — more than I have had in any book since *Green Gables* so I feel

it is good of its kind.”¹⁵ But when she turns to *Emily climbs*, she comments pessimistically:

I am working on a second Emily book now and later there will be a third. These two will be only hack-work. But I enjoyed writing *Emily of New Moon* and I do think it is good of its kind. The charm went out when I finished it and cannot be recaptured for a whole series.¹⁶

This passage was written well before *Emily climbs* was published; in retrospect, when she got stuck attempting to finish *Emily's quest*, Montgomery came to feel that the task of writing *Emily climbs* was not so bad after all:

I wrote *Emily of New Moon* with intense pleasure. I wrote *Emily climbs* not unenjoyably. But I have written Emily III so far with reluctance and distaste. So it will not amount to anything.¹⁷

One reason for Montgomery's gloom is that as an author no less than as a minister's wife, she feels compelled to meet public expectations she is not inclined to satisfy:

I've been trying, at odd intervals, to get my plot of Emily III mapped out. I really haven't a great deal of interest in it. I was really interested in New Moon, but found the writing of Emily II a bit of a bore. A book dealing with a "miss" is always difficult for me to write — because the public and the publishers won't allow me to write of the young girl as she really is. One can write of children as they are; but when you come to write of the flapper you have to depict a sweet young thing — really a child grown older — to whom the basic realities of life and reaction thereto are entirely 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.¹⁸

In another complaint, Montgomery blames her own incapacity, rather than external pressures, for her difficulties with *Emily's quest*:

You ask about my literary activities. Well, just now I am trying to marry Emily off and am finding her a bit of a handful. Not because of any special perversity on her part — but simply because — alack! — I can't write a young-girl-romantic-love story. My impish sense of humour always spoils everything.¹⁹

We do not have to accept without qualification Montgomery's somewhat contradictory expressions of despondency about the last two volumes of the trilogy. Writers have often disparaged some of their best work. In this instance, I think Montgomery was right to feel that *Emily of New Moon* was the best novel in

the trilogy, and *Emily's quest* the least satisfactory, but the falling off does not seem to be quite as dramatic as she believed it to be. It does appear evident, however, that Montgomery's view of the restrictive conventions she faced and the limited success she was achieving greatly affected the tone of the final volume. Emily's despair is her despair, just as Emily's earlier delight in "the flash" was Montgomery's own tribute to the joy of life and literary creation. The emotional depths of *Emily's quest* are sounded, not in the exhilaration Emily still sometimes feels as a creator or even in her happiness when finally united with Teddy, but rather in the passages nakedly revealing moods of profound depression.

Yet another factor in Montgomery's complex attitude towards her work in this period appears to have been a feeling of guilt about her failure to develop a more ambitious project. She blamed herself, in essence, for not attempting to climb a higher Alpine Path. Even in her initial enthusiasm for *Emily of New Moon* she writes that the novel is "along the old lines" because she does not have the "unbroken leisure I want for a more serious attempt."²⁰ A year later, she tells Weber the same story:

No, I haven't yet "tackled my adult novel." It is impossible under present conditions. I keep hoping I shall "have more time later on" but "later on" I have even less. It is all pretty well shaped out in my mind but I cannot write it by fits and starts, as I do my Annes and Emilys.²¹

Four years later, Weber attempts to compliment Montgomery by suggesting that *The Blue Castle* is her adult book, but she will not be flattered. She finally reveals the exact nature of her cherished *magnum opus*:

I take this to be a reference to a long-ago confession of mine that I wanted some day to write a book for adults. Oh, no, this is not the book of my ambition. . . . "The" book is still unwritten. Though I hope to write it still: a book portraying the life among the big "clan" families of the Maritimes. I come of three of them. . . . and I know the life from A to Z if I can only get it on paper *alive*.²²

Montgomery's view of herself as an unwilling slave of public taste whose best work remains unwritten cannot have worked to the advantage of the trilogy. There is a sad irony in all of this: the Emily books are far more a personal expression, far less the product of external pressures, than their author seems to have realized. Whatever the potential merit of her projected saga, it could not possibly have contained much more of Montgomery's inner spirit, or even of her particular insight into Island society, than may be found in the *Emily* trilogy.

The mixture of reverence for literary creation and persistent melancholy that

we find in the *Emily* novels is, I have tried to show, related to Montgomery's character and conception of herself. No writer is an island, however; in Montgomery's case, the effect of the literary backgrounds one can associate with her — the inheritance of Romanticism, the situation of the woman writer, the influence of the Canadian milieu — may well have been to reinforce the tendency toward soul-searching and sorrow in her work.

The *Emily* novels are intensely Romantic works. Especially in *Emily of New Moon*, the protagonist's delight in Nature (which extends to symbolic identification: she is called a star, a skylark, a young eagle and a wild cherry tree) and joy in the "flash" define her being. In one extended and passionate scene, the narrator uses the Romantic vocabulary of Nature-worship as religion and poet as priest to describe Emily's emotions upon gazing at the Northern lights: "She was a high priestess of loveliness assisting at the divine rites of her worship" (*EC*, 170).

When Romantic visions fade, however, there are also specifically Romantic forms of depression. In a passage which in its entirety alludes to both the "Intimations Ode" and "Tintern Abbey," Emily wonders whether she might lose "the flash": "Will I lose it altogether as I grow old? Will nothing but 'the light of common day' be mine then?" (*EQ*, 182). In sympathy with Shelley's lament that "the mind in creation is as a fading coal," Emily regrets that "*Nothing* ever seems . . . as beautiful and grand . . . when it is written out, as it does when you are thinking or feeling about it" (*EC*, 9). In the account of Emily's "great and awful weariness" of the soul, already quoted, one can find a parallel with the "grief without a pang" of Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode," particularly since Emily, like Coleridge, attributes tragic utterances to the wind (*EQ*, 181).

If Romantic poets fear the loss of visionary power, women novelists (or fictional women novelists) may have cause to fear the harmful consequences of divided interests. As Patricia Meyer Spacks has said, "the conflict between the yearning for artistic expression and the desire for relationship is not peculiar women, but women are likely to experience it with special intensity."²³ At the conscious level, Emily experiences little of this conflict, since Teddy is himself an artist, and interests himself in her work. Yet, as we have seen, love for Teddy gets in the way of Emily's devotion to her art; even more fundamentally, Emily's feeling for Teddy is directly contrary to the state of mind which best suits her Romantic art. As an artist, Emily needs to walk by her wild lone; as a lover, Emily literally comes to Teddy's whistle, feeling "in the mad ecstasy of the moment" (*EQ*, 120) that she is "helpless — dominated" (*EQ*, 121) and reveling in her abasement.

Yet, if in this episode Emily's conduct seems to recall the behaviour of the Victorian heroine, she also may be linked with the women novelists who were contemporary with her creator. In her influential book, *A literature of their own*, Elaine Showalter suggests that women novelists of the 1920s "found

themselves pulled apart by the conflicting claims of love and art."²⁴ Consequently, novels of Montgomery's own time portray heroines subject to the kind of distress from which Emily suffers in much of *Emily's quest*. As Showalter puts it: "The female *Künstlerroman* of this period is a saga of defeat defeat. . . There is indeed a new interest in the psychology of women, but it is full of self-recrimination."²⁵ Like her creator, Emily seems half-Victorian, half-modern; half-submissive, half self-sufficient; half the socially acceptable public mask, half the intensely private creative personality. The conventional ending of *Emily's quest* does not really unify these divided selves.

To add to Emily's plight, she has to bear the burden of being a Canadian artist. This aspect of her misfortune is not strongly emphasized on the surface, but it emerges if one compares her trials with the difficulties other artist figures in Canadian fiction have to face. Like David Canaan or Philip Bentley, Emily has to live among rural people whose imaginations are shown to be limited, and whose sympathies are narrow. Like David Newman of Patricia Blondal's *A candle to light the sun* and the artist heroines of Margaret Laurence's fiction, Emily has to struggle to define her own individuality while groping with ambivalent feelings about the stern representatives of the Celtic tradition in Canada. Like Rose, the protagonist of *Who do you think you are?*, Emily learns to adopt disguises as the best defence against public scorn of the unconventional sensibility.

Emily shares with most of the characters already mentioned the representative dilemma of the Canadian artist figure: on the whole, she is not in harmony with the local society of her upbringing, yet she cannot bring herself to shake off its influence. For David Canaan, the consequences of being "neither one thing nor the other"²⁶ are tragic. To satisfy herself or public expectations (or both) Montgomery allows Emily to have both artistic success and loyalty to her culture. The happy ending enabled Montgomery to experience vicariously the delights of the road not taken: Montgomery herself, after all, had forsaken P.E.I. for Ontario manses, and had come to feel that "a certain part of my soul" had been "long starved" in "years of exile."²⁷ Emily's choice to remain at New Moon can be viewed more generally as representing the Romantic's preference of the rural to the urban world, the traditional heroine's preference of the familiar to the unknown, and the Canadian artist's inability to break free.

For Kipling's untamed cat, "all places are the same." For Emily and her fellow Canadian artists, attachment to place can mean both spiritual discipline and spiritual confinement. Emily's triumphant self-mastery and conquest of the outer world reflect the lessons learned by her creator, who could write of herself:

Yes, I agree with you that all the trials of an uncongenial environment should be regarded as *discipline*. . . I used to to be a most impulsive, passionate creature. . . It was a very

was a very serious defect and injurious to me in many ways, mentally, morally, physically. I see now that it needed to be corrected and the life I have had to live has been of all others the one best calculated to correct it.²⁸

The darker passages of the *Emily* trilogy tell another story. The penalty of bondage to more limited minds is inevitable alienation, an unbridgeable gap between the real and the ideal. In another letter, Montgomery writes:

So, as a rule, I am very careful to be shallow and conventional where depth and originality are wasted. When I get very desperate I retreat into my realms of cloudland. . . .²⁹

The ecstasy and despair of a life dedicated to art and hindered by social pressures is the real subject of the *Emily* trilogy. This is an ambitious theme; moreover, it is also the underlying theme of Montgomery's own life. In the *Emily* novels, Montgomery wrote her own spiritual autobiography, and these works would have been even finer achievements if their author had realized that in writing them she had climbed the Alpine Path to heights as lofty as any she might have attained by composing an "adult novel."

NOTES

- ¹ *The wheel of things: a biography of L.M. Montgomery* (Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1975).
- ² Uncovered by Mollie Gillen, and now in the Public Archives of Canada. Published in part as *My Dear Mr. M: Letters to G.B. MacMillan*, ed. Francis W.P. Bolger and Elizabeth R. Epperly (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1980). Montgomery's letters to Ephraim Weber are also held by the Public Archives. The 1905 to 1909 portion of this collection has been published as *The Green Gables letters*, ed. Wilfrid Eggleston (Toronto: Ryerson, 1960).
- ³ Sept. 15, 1941. In *My Dear Mr. M.*, p. 204.
- ⁴ Letter to Weber, Oct. 19, 1921, pp. 7-8. P.A.C. Call Number, MG30 D53. Further references to Montgomery's letters to Weber are to this source.
- ⁵ In *My Dear Mr. M.*, pp. 36-37.
- ⁶ *Emily's quest* (1927; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1972), p. 177. Further references are to this Canadian Children's Favourites edition, and appear in the text.
- ⁷ *Emily of New Moon* (1923; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973), p. 322. Further references are to this edition, and appear in the text.
- ⁸ Another indication of the close link between Emily and Montgomery is the fact that Montgomery herself in her childhood wrote letters to her dead mother: "You ask if the device of Emily's letters to her dead father is original with me. Yes, as far as my knowledge and belief goes. . . I used to write letters myself in childhood to my dead mother." Letter to Weber, Nov. 1, 1924, p. 4.
- ⁹ *Anne of Green Gables* (1908; rpt. Toronto: Ryerson, 1968), p. 97.
- ¹⁰ *The Alpine Path: the story of my career* (1917; rpt. Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, n.d.), p. 10.

- ¹¹ *Emily climbs* (1925; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), pp. 268-69. Further references are to this edition, and appear in the text.
- ¹² "The cat that walked by himself," in *Just so stories* (1902; rpt. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page, 1927), VIII, 181.
- ¹³ Oct. 17, 1923, p. 5.
- ¹⁴ To Weber, Oct. 19, 1921, p. 6.
- ¹⁵ To Weber, Sept. 25, 1922 (section dated Oct. 22), p. 20.
- ¹⁶ To Weber, Oct. 17, 1923, p. 11.
- ¹⁷ To Weber July 18, 1926, pp. 13-14.
- ¹⁸ To Weber Nov. 1, 1924, p. 4. Similar sentiments, in nearly the same words, may be found in a lengthy letter to MacMillan begun on Sept. 3, 1924. See *My Dear Mr. M.*, pp. 118-119.
- ¹⁹ To Weber July 18, 1926, p. 13.
- ²⁰ To Weber Sept. 25, 1922 (section dated Oct. 22), p. 20.
- ²¹ To Weber Oct. 17, 1923, p. 11.
- ²² Nov. 16, 1927, p. 4.
- ²³ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The female imagination* (1975; rpt. New York: Avon, 1976), p. 213.
- ²⁴ Elaine Showalter, *A literature of their own: British women novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), p. 244.
- ²⁵ Showalter, p. 244.
- ²⁶ Ernest Buckler, *The mountain and the valley* (1952; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1961), p. 171.
- ²⁷ To MacMillan, Sept. 3, 1924. In *My Dear Mr. M.*, p. 115.
- ²⁸ To MacMillan, March 19, 1906. In *My Dear Mr. M.*, p. 19.
- ²⁹ To MacMillan, Dec. 3, 1905. In *My Dear Mr. M.*, p. 17.

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CCL regrets that three errors appeared in the L.M. Montgomery short story in Issue #29. The corrections are italicized below.

- p. 37, l. 29: Anna had *gone* liltng down the lane
 p. 38, l. 16: returned to tell *Alma* that they were married!
 p. 40, l. 32: looked at *Alma* in bewilderment.