

Writing with a "Definite Purpose": L.M. Montgomery, Nellie L. McClung and the Politics of Imperial Motherhood in Fic- tion for Children

• Cecily Devereux •

Résumé: Cet article replace les romans de L.M. Montgomery dans le contexte du féminisme canadien-anglais du début du siècle dernier: si elle reste avant tout un devoir à l'égard de l'empire britannique, la maternité est aussi un choix et une vocation pour les femmes. Le rapprochement suivi entre la série des récits consacrés à Anne et la trilogie de l'héroïne Pearlie Watson de Nellie McClung montre que la vision de la maternité chez ces deux romancières n'est pas si éloignée qu'on pourrait le croire, car toutes les deux produisent des récits didactiques destinés aux jeunes filles. Leurs oeuvres, qui relèvent de ce que C. Devereux appelle un nouveau genre impérial, le roman de la mère ou "Mutterroman", cherchent à inculquer chez les lectrices l'idéologie de la maternité au service de l'expansionnisme britannique au tournant du XXe siècle.

Summary: This paper situates L.M. Montgomery's Anne books in the context of early-twentieth-century English-Canadian feminism, by tracing the ways in which Anne's narrative valorizes maternalism as an imperial "duty," but also as a choice and a profession for women. Montgomery's Anne series is aligned here with Nellie McClung's almost exactly contemporary Pearlie Watson trilogy: the similarities between the two suggest that Montgomery and McClung are not as politically disparate as they might seem, and that both women ought to be seen to be engaged in producing a didactic fiction for children. This fiction, described here as a new imperial genre that might best be understood as a "Mutterroman," works ideologically to inculcate young women readers into the culture of imperial motherhood, which had become so crucial to the work of expansion at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

If women could be made to think, they would see that it is woman's place to lift high the standard of morality.

— McClung, *In Times Like These* 43

In 1924, J.D. Logan and Donald French suggested that what they called the "Second Renaissance" of Canadian literature was heralded by the publication in 1908 of three novels: "*Anne of Green Gables*, by L.M. Montgomery; *Duncan Polite*, by Marian Keith; [and] *Sowing Seeds in Danny*, by Nellie L. McClung" (299). French and Logan's texts are significant, not only because all three novels are written by women, thus reinforcing Carole Gerson's account of the numbers of women who have been eliminated from the national canon in the second half of the century, but because the two which remain well known — *Anne of Green Gables* and *Sowing Seeds in Danny* — both construct an idea of the imperial mother as the empire's "white hope" (McClung's phrase) in Canada, the empire's white dominion and its last best west.¹ Both works, that is, and, ultimately, both of the series of which each is a first instalment, undertake to displace the old new woman of the 1890s with a new "new woman," the woman as "mother of the race," a gesture that is the defining characteristic of first-wave imperialist feminism after the Boer War, especially in the white settler colonies. Both works, moreover, undertake to delineate the nature of the work of the "mother of the race" for an audience which would be composed primarily of children.

Although the idea of women's social work as an extension of what is commonly represented in the nineteenth century as a feminine and specifically maternal domestic function underlies a good deal of mid- to late-Victorian feminism (such as, for instance, women's anti-slavery activism, and the work of Josephine Butler to counter the Contagious Diseases Acts),² it is not until after the Boer War that Anglo-Saxon women's perceived function as "mothers of the race" would be regularly articulated in imperialist — or, for that matter, in feminist — rhetoric. The 1899-1902 war had been a disaster for Britain, and it was not so much the loss of the South African territory that had been catastrophic, as the revelation of what was considered to be racial degeneracy amongst young male recruits: "a great many of them," notes Anna Davin, "were found to be physically unfit for service — too small for instance, or too slight, or with heart troubles, weak lungs, rheumatic tendencies, flat feet, or bad teeth" (15).³ By and large, Davin suggests, the blame for the condition of British youth was foisted upon their mothers, seen to be "ignorant," among the working classes, of "the necessary conditions for the bringing up of healthy children" (15), and to be reluctant, among the middle classes, to forgo the "advancement" won by the "new woman." Frank McDonough has suggested that the Boer War was a "turning point" in the history of the Empire, an event which operates as a catalyst for a shift in

"British attitudes towards the Empire and imperial defence in the period from 1902 to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914" (101). It had, it might be added, a comparably catalytic effect upon feminism in the British Empire, which, in this same period, struggled to oust the hazardous "new woman" who had come to epitomize women's "advancement." Imperial feminists in the first decade of the twentieth century sought first to demonstrate a commitment to the ideas of progress, civilization, and, ultimately, racial dominance, arguing that these goals could only be achieved through the work of the Anglo-Saxon woman as "mother of the race." By the end of the Boer War, feminism had become a politics of emancipation for the advance of imperial civilization, configuring the womb of the Anglo-Saxon mother as the empire's one inalienable asset and the last best site for the renewal of "the race," and representing mother-women working for social purity as the last hope for imperial regeneration.

The performance of this gesture in fiction written for girls is a compelling sign of the pervasiveness of anxiety about "the race" and the empire in the context of rapid expansion, and a salient reminder of imperial efforts to regulate reproduction through the didactic reinforcement, at an early age, of normative gender roles. The valorizing of this fiction — specifically *Anne of Green Gables* and *Sowing Seeds in Danny* — as the beginning of a nationalist "Renaissance" in English Canada is an indication of a new importance which was accruing to white women as mothers on what were perceived to be the frontiers of empire. In English Canada, which had been constructed in imperialist discourse since the middle of the nineteenth century as "the white man's last opportunity," or the last hope for the westward expansion of the Empire, maternal feminism found a strong foothold — stronger, arguably, than at the imperial centre, primarily because of the perceived need for white women on the frontier.⁴ The Anglo-Canadian "mother of the race," it is implicit, was in a better position to push for the vote, since here she was engaged in the work of imperial expansion, and was, moreover, aware of her reproductive worth in the culture of empire-wide race-based anxiety that was exacerbated for white settlers in the last west by the influx of what J.S. Woodsworth in 1909 referred to as "the incoming multitudes" of "foreigners" (8). These factors may help to explain why white female enfranchisement was achieved earlier in the settler colonies than at the centre; they also explain why maternalism became the dominant feminist ideology of the early-twentieth century in English Canada.⁵ What remains unexplained are the convergences of maternalism in feminist and apparently non-feminist fiction: this paper begins to address the question of the implications of these convergences for our understanding of the early-twentieth-century feminist movement usually referred to as the first-wave, by considering the remarkably similar way in which maternalism is narrativized in and after 1908 by two such politically disparate writers as Montgomery and McClung.

Despite their having been linked by Logan and French, McClung and Montgomery are not usually discussed together, and are rarely presented as “feminist” contemporaries: Erika Rothwell’s 1999 essay, “Knitting Up the World: L.M. Montgomery and Maternal Feminism in Canada,” is one of very few studies to align the two authors. Part of the reason for this separation is their own positioning in relation to early-twentieth-century feminist discourse: they are not usually regarded as having been political “kindred spirits.” McClung is certainly English Canada’s best-known and most influential maternal feminist, whose suffrage activism, articulated in her 1915 manifesto, *In Times Like These*, was arguably the driving force in the granting of the vote to women in Manitoba in 1916 and in Canada in 1918. Montgomery, for her part, is almost as well known for her lack of interest in the struggle for female enfranchisement. Mollie Gillen cites an interview in the *Boston Republic* in 1910, two years after the first publication of *Anne of Green Gables*, in which Montgomery is described as “distinctly conservative.... She has no favour for woman suffrage; she believes in the home-loving woman” (cited in Gillen 85-6). This stance is re-emphasized in her journals: Montgomery wrote on several occasions of her lack of any “particular interest in politics”: “I never,” she maintained in 1917, “felt any especial desire to vote. I thought, as a merely academic question, that women certainly should vote. It seemed ridiculous, for example that an educated, intelligent woman should not vote when any illiterate, half or wholly disloyal foreigner could. But it did not worry me in the least” (*SJ II* 234).

Montgomery’s lack of interest in suffragism at a time when activists like McClung were beginning to make a strong case for the vote for women in Canada suggests that her novels are not engaged with the discourse of early-twentieth-century feminism, such as McClung was producing. However, the many similarities between Montgomery’s “Anne” series and McClung’s “Pearlie Watson” trilogy demonstrate that the two writers are not quite as far apart on questions of gender and ideology as their different points of view with regard to female enfranchisement seem to indicate. Indeed, it is clear that — in their fiction, at any rate — the two women writers were practising fundamentally the same politics, at least as far as the education and development of young girls and of the English-Canadian nation were concerned. As we can see when we align the “Anne” books with the “Pearlie” stories, both women were reproducing and promoting the culture of imperial motherhood that is the hallmark of feminism in the British Empire in the early twentieth century.

The “Anne” series and the “Pearlie Watson” trilogy have a good deal in common, arguably, indeed, more in common (despite the long-standing rumours of plagiarism) than do Montgomery’s novel and American writer Kate Douglas Wiggin’s *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, published five years earlier.⁶ *Anne of Green Gables* was Montgomery’s first published novel. *Sowing*

Seeds in Danny was McClung's. Both were published in 1908. Both turned out to be the first novels of what would become popular serial narratives: Montgomery eventually published eight Anne books; McClung wrote two sequels to the first Pearlie Watson story. Both series — or parts of them — have maintained some currency: as Carrie MacMillan notes, while other English-Canadian women writers of the early-twentieth century have disappeared, "L.M. Montgomery and Nellie McClung have always maintained their hold" (208).⁷ And, although it is the Anne books that, by the end of the twentieth century, have taken on such immense cultural capital, there are three volumes of McClung's writing still in print, and an increase in academic interest in her work, while not on the scale of the rapidly expanding Anne industry, is certainly evident.⁸

There are some obvious similarities between the Anne and Pearlie narratives: both are stories of young English-Canadian (or, to be more specific, Canadian-born Anglo-Celtic) girls moving from pre-adolescence to mid-teens. Anne Shirley is an orphan, her parents having died of typhoid when she was an infant. Pearl Watson's parents are living, but are absent from home much of the time, working. Both girls have had to take on adult responsibilities: Anne has been caring for other people's children only a little younger than herself; Pearl, we are told, is the "second mother" of the six smaller Watsons, "keeping the house ... six days in the week" (McClung, *Sowing Seeds* 11). Like Anne, Pearl is represented as the best and brightest in her community. Like Anne, she wins scholarships, and is enabled to further her education through a bequest which is represented as a reward for good deeds. Pearl, like Anne, becomes a teacher; subsequently, like Anne, she marries her first love. Indeed, her first love, like Anne's, is a doctor, and, given that the doctor is a figure always invested with especial value in expansionist fiction as an arbiter of social and moral as well as physical hygiene, the union of teacher and doctor in the two stories is worth noting as a sign that the narratives are converging along the lines of race regeneration and, notably, instruction.

But it is the entrenchment of the two narratives in the idea of white woman as "mother of the race" that brings Anne's and Pearlie's stories even more compellingly into alignment within a discourse of imperial maternalism as a reproductive and social politics: this idea is insistently developed throughout each series, and is already readily apparent in the first instalments. In *Anne of Green Gables*, for instance, race and gender are foregrounded as crucial marks of identity for Anne: it matters very much that she is a girl and not a boy; it matters that she is not what Marilla refers to as a "street Arab," but is "native born" (AGG 6). Pearlie's gender is similarly emphasized, and her Anglo-Celtic identity is comparably performed in the brogue which characterizes her speech before she goes to school. Both *Anne* and *Sowing Seeds in Danny*, moreover, tell stories of older women converted to

maternalism by young Anglo-Celtic Canadian girls who are characterized not only by their — more or less — motherlessness, but by their motherliness:⁹ Anne, we are told, is “real knacky” with babies: her saving of Minnie May Barrie from croup is presented as irrefutable proof of her incipient and already well-developed skill. Pearl, identified at the beginning of the narrative as the alternative “mother” for her brothers and sisters is repeatedly shown to be “instinctively” maternal. They are both thus well-positioned to find what is represented in both works as latent, but untapped, springs of “mother-love,” in the Anne stories, in Marilla Cuthbert, and, in McClung’s novel, Mrs. J. Burton Francis. These “awakenings” constitute the groundwork upon which both narratives will develop: Anne finds a home where she can grow once she leads Marilla to discover what we are told is “the maternity she had missed, perhaps” (AGG 76); Pearl sets in motion the process of — as we are told in the title of the first novel — sowing seeds in Danny, or the “plant[ing] of the seeds of virtue and honesty in [the] fertile soil” (McClung, *Sowing Seeds* 19-20) of the eponymous child’s character, when she strips away the “encrusted” and, we are to see, impractical theories of motherhood which Mrs. Francis has been reading and attempting to apply to Mrs. Watson, and finds the same “instinctive” maternalism.¹⁰ Marked in its emergence, like Marilla’s “throb,” with a “strange flush” and a “strange feeling stirring her heart” (McClung, *Sowing Seeds* 28), “mother-love,” we are to see as it wells up in Mrs. Francis, is inherent in all women, and only needs to be revealed and directed by those women for whom it comes naturally, like Anne and Pearlie.

When these two novel series focus so intently on the representation of “mother-love” in childless older women and in adolescent girls, they reproduce and reinforce the early-twentieth-century notions of essential — and, increasingly, in the context of the psychoanalytic discourse of the period, normal — femininity as defined by the desire to have children, and the instinct to care for them.¹¹ McClung would articulate this notion in her 1915 suffrage manifesto, *In Times Like These*: “Women are naturally the guardians of the race,” she wrote, “and every normal woman desires children” (25). This “desire” becomes the focus of both series. Anne’s decision to take the “path” that leads to motherhood and not to a career is already implicit in the ending of *Anne of Green Gables*, when she gives up her scholarship to stay at home with Marilla after Matthew’s death. She does not diverge from this “path” in the second novel, *Anne of Avonlea* (1909), which begins with a telling epigraph from John Greenleaf Whittier’s narrative poem, “Among the Hills”:

Flowers spring to blossom where she walks
 The careful ways of duty;
 Our hard, stiff lines of life with her
 Are flowing curves of beauty. (88)¹²

This second novel, which begins with Anne dreaming of her influence upon male students who will grow up to be “famous personage[s]” (AA 2), gives most of its attention to Anne’s growth as a motherly and loving teacher of children; it ends with her about to leave to go to college, but drawn by the sight of Diana’s baby to another “path,” and to imagine a “home o’ dreams” where she and Gilbert Blythe will live. This “home” materializes in the fourth novel, *Anne’s House of Dreams* (1917), when it becomes clear that her “ambition,” from the beginning, has been to produce, as she puts it, “living epistles,” or, of course, children.¹³ Anna Davin has pointed out that motherhood in the early-twentieth century “was to be given new dignity: it was the duty and destiny of women to be the ‘mothers of the race,’ but also their great reward” (13). Anne’s “choice” of “duty and destiny” leads her to what is suggested is a greater happiness than she could have found if she had chosen not to follow this path.

Pearl’s story unfolds along a similar trajectory. She begins the series demonstrating a pronounced love of hygiene and a desire to care for all those in her family and community who need some kind of moral or social “uplift.” She thus reaffirms what McClung, like so many first-wave feminists, maintained was white women’s superior morality and natural inclination to clean — their societies as well as their homes. Her “mothering” continues as she finds the lost maternalism of the ironically named Mrs. Motherwell, drives drunk out of Millford, and helps to cure a child of tuberculosis. Her driving ambition, however, through all three instalments, and, significantly, most emphatically through her push for woman suffrage in the 1921 novel *Purple Springs*, is to marry Horace Clay, and, it is implicit, to give vent to the maternalism for which she has been finding outlets (and converts, like Mrs. Francis and Mrs. Motherwell) since the first pages of the first novel. As is the case for Anne, her romance is not just a love story: rather, it is deliberately embedded in an ideology of race, gender, nation and empire that directs the young Anglo-Celtic girl towards motherhood, and the Anglo-Celtic nation towards imperial regeneration through eugenical reproduction. Gilbert Blythe is not only a doctor; he is represented as a young man who has come from “fine old stock” (AI3); Horace Clay’s sturdy salt-of-the-earth quality is implicit in his patronym. These are the men who, with these ideal mothers, will bring the race to the new day which dawns for the “real empire-builders” at the end of the last Watson novel (McClung, *Purple Springs* 72).

Eve Kornfield and Susan Jackson have suggested that *Anne of Green Gables* ought to be regarded, with other “girl” books such as Wiggin’s *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903) and (more problematically) Louisa May Alcott’s much earlier *Little Women* (1868), as what they call a “female *Bildungsroman*,” a genre which they describe as a “synthesis of the [implicitly male] coming-of-age novel ... and domestic fiction” (139). Given, however, the extent to which Anne’s whole story, from *Green Gables* orphan to “matron” of

Ingleside, is one in which motherhood is insistently positioned as the culmination of “womanly” ambition, it might be more to the point to see *Anne of Green Gables* — with McClung’s *Sowing Seeds in Danny* — as what we might call a *Mutterroman*. The *Mutterroman*, as it emerges in early-twentieth-century English Canada in such novels as the Anne books, thus may not be explained entirely in terms of what Kornfield and Jackson have argued is the “female *Bildungsroman*’s” negotiation of “the constraints of domestic fiction and the need to create a credible facsimile of life” in a “male world” (151) or what T.D. MacLulich has described as “Montgomery’s acquiescence to the secondary and largely domestic role her society traditionally assigned to women” (464). The *Mutterroman* is, rather, concerned with the promotion of the idea of woman as “mother of the race.” It is a genre which reproduces the ideology of race regeneration that was being deployed in the first decade of the century in the wave of imperialist discourse burgeoning in the late-nineteenth-century expansionist years, and with increasing anxiety in the years following the crisis of the Boer War. Although it is not concerned primarily with instruction in the science of mothering which Anna Davin has pointed out appears in the early century under the designation of “mothercraft” (39), but with the inculcation of young girls into the culture of mothering, the *Mutterroman* is a definitively didactic genre. Emerging in the context of the idea of English Canada’s importance as the empire’s last best west, it marks a shift in the genres, vocabulary, and narratives of imperial popular fiction for children, from Victorian and late-nineteenth-century stories of mostly male conquest and colonization, to stories of renewal, reform, and reproduction, tasks in which women were to play a crucial role. This shift in genres stages in popular narrative the ideological transition which Davin notes occurring after the turn of the century, from the domestic to the political and social performance of maternalism by women. It also powerfully indicates the cultural pervasiveness of an imperialism which built on the idea of woman as “mother of the race” within the rhetoric of feminism as well as in less overtly political (but no less ideological) constructions of womanhood that were directed at children.

Few readers will object to the categorization of McClung’s fiction as explicitly interested in inculcating girl readers into the maternal feminist ideology for which she functioned by 1915 as an influential national representative. McClung’s writing has long been regarded as didactic, and we do not have to look far to find McClung herself avowing instruction as the primary motivation for her work. Her declaration of “the position that no one should put pen to paper unless he or she had something to say that would amuse, entertain, instruct, inform, comfort, or guide the reader” (*Stream Runs* 79) is regularly cited by her biographers and critics as what she herself called the “Writer’s Creed.” It is to make a point of this profession that McClung recounts in her autobiography the story of her response to a “writer

in the *Canadian Author*" (it was Wilfrid Eggleston) who, in an October 1943 article called "Nellie McClung — Crusader," argued that McClung's "didactic enthusiasm ... marred her art": "Some of her stories," he wrote, "are sermons in the guise of fiction. There is the flavor of the Sunday School hymn and the Foreign Mission Board in some of her work" (cited in McClung *Stream Runs* 69). McClung, who shows herself to have been (not surprisingly) sensitive to the charge of being unliterary, responded thus:

I hope I have been a crusader, and I would be very proud to think that I had even remotely approached the grandeur of a Sunday School hymn. I have never worried about my art. I have written as clearly as I could, never idly or dishonestly, and if some of my stories are, as Mr. Eggleston says, sermons in disguise, my earnest hope is that the disguise did not obscure the sermon. (*Stream Runs* 69)

The sermon, that is, as Randi Warne has demonstrated in her study of the "Christian social activism" of McClung's fiction, is the element which, for McClung, gives art its value.

Montgomery, conversely, disavowed didacticism as deliberately as McClung endorsed it.¹⁴ In *The Alpine Path*, the early story of her career, written in 1917 for the Toronto magazine *Everywoman's World*, and subsequently published in book form under the same title, Montgomery drew attention to her opposition to didacticism in fiction, citing one of her own journal entries from the 1890s:

I write a great many juvenile stories. I like doing these, but I should like it better if I didn't have to drag a 'moral' into most of them. They won't sell without it, as a rule. So in the moral must go, broad or subtle, as suits the fibre of the particular editor I have in view. The kind of juvenile story I like best to write — and read, too, for the matter of that — is a good, jolly one, 'art for art's sake,' or rather, 'fun for fun's sake,' with no insidious moral hidden away in it like a pill in a spoonful of jam! (*Alpine Path* 61-2)

The implication, of course, is that by 1917 Montgomery was no longer at the mercy of editors, but could write what she liked, "with no insidious moral."

This problematic self-representation raises, however, a number of questions for readers of Montgomery's work: for instance, when it is thus separated between that which necessarily capitulates to editorial constraints and that which promotes this creed of "art for art's sake," how do we distinguish the two categories? Is all her work from what Francis Bolger calls "the years before Anne" to be regarded as didactic, while all subsequent work can be seen to be purely "fun"? Where does *Anne of Green Gables* fit into the

scheme within which Montgomery would like her readers to see her writing? And, perhaps most importantly, if *Anne of Green Gables* is not didactic and has “no insidious moral hidden away in it,” why does Anne choose home and domestic duty over education? Why does *Anne of Avonlea* begin — and end — with an invocation to womanly duty? Why is Anne directed with such persistence away from a career and towards domesticity in *Anne of the Island*? Why does her path not diverge, through eight novels, from the direction chosen at the end of the first? Why is her story, even into the 1930s, so much like Pearl’s, which is self-consciously and deliberately instructional and profoundly maternalist? And, since it is so much like Pearl’s, why is McClung’s series seen to be feminist, while Montgomery’s is not? Is Montgomery’s lack of interest in woman suffrage enough to make her work not-feminist?

It is in fact quite possible to suggest that Montgomery’s writing, even after the potentially liberating success of *Anne of Green Gables*, might all be engaged in more than “fun for fun’s sake,” and to be as much embedded in first-wave feminism’s fundamental ideologies of race, gender and empire as McClung’s. Indeed, the politics of instruction that can be seen to inform a good deal more of Montgomery’s fiction than she is willing to acknowledge are articulated as one of these “insidious moral[s]” in one of her “juvenile stories.” In a 1904 story, “At the Bay Shore Farm,” Montgomery presents an encounter between a young woman with literary ambitions (like Anne, like Emily) and a woman whom she does not realize is actually her literary idol. The woman, Frances Newbury, and the idol, Sara Beaumont, discuss the hard struggle of a woman writer up what Montgomery would always refer to as “the Alpine path,” and end with a new light breaking for Frances on the value and, most significantly, the duty of literature. It was, we are told,

an earnest, helpful talk that went far to inspire Frances’ hazy ambition with a definite purpose. She understood that she must not write merely to win fame for herself or even for the higher motive of pure pleasure in her work. She must aim, however humbly, to help her readers to higher planes of thought and endeavour. Then and only then would it be worthwhile. (78-9)

This is a very McClungian view of the work of fiction, and of the work of the woman writer in particular. McClung spoke frequently throughout her career about what she called “the social responsibilities of women”: these responsibilities can be summarized, as the epigraph to this paper suggests, as “see[ing] that it is a woman’s place to lift high the standard of morality” (*In Times* 43). Although neither Frances nor Sara Beaumont can function as an unproblematized voice for Montgomery, it is powerfully suggested by this story’s moral that these responsibilities cannot be divorced from the work of the woman writer, for either McClung or Montgomery. A woman’s fiction,

according to both, must “aim ... to help her readers to higher planes of thought and endeavour.”

According to the Anne books, as well as the Pearlie Watson trilogy, these “higher planes” — for girl readers at least — have to do with a normativizing of a desire to have children, and a valorizing of the maternal work of women at home and in the community. What is implicit in all of these stories is the objective that Frances imbibes from Sara Beaumont: Montgomery, too, that is, should be seen to want “to help her readers to higher planes of thought and endeavour,” specifically with regard to womanly endeavour in the context of imperial expansion and anxiety about the reproduction of “the race.” Her imperatives in the “insidious moral” of the 1904 story indicate that her own sense of the work of the woman writer must be understood in the same terms as the work which Anne pursues from the end of the first novel to the end of the series — the idea of womanly and, even at this early stage, a fundamentally maternal duty which closes *Anne of Green Gables* and opens *Anne of Avonlea*, in the Whittier epigraph. The woman writer, that is, is also a “mother of the race,” her work necessarily instructional, with the “definite purpose” of presenting girl readers with a maternalist model. It is not simply coincidental that both Anne Shirley and Pearlie Watson become teachers; nor is it a simple indication of one of a very few career options for women in early-twentieth-century English Canada: Anne and Pearlie both function as metonymic representatives of the instructing woman writer herself, and as models of the maternalist ideology which both novel series are so interested in promoting. Both Pearlie and Anne are not only providing instruction to their fictional students, but to their readers as well.

The implication of this didacticism is that Montgomery’s writing, like McClung’s, should be seen to be embedded in an ideology of maternal feminism and to be reproducing a particular social model which takes up the imperialist position that Anglo-colonial women were especially valuable, as reproductive and moral agents who needed to be able to do their work for the good of “the race.” Critics have argued for many years about the feminism of the Anne books: when we situate the novels in relation to the early-twentieth-century idea of white woman as “mother of the race,” as texts which reproduce and promote this idea, it is possible to say that the Anne books are feminist because they perform the early-twentieth-century feminist work of valorizing the imperial mother, and, most importantly, of representing the imperial mother as a model for young girls. The Anne books thus work, as McClung’s fiction does, to awaken women to their duty and to mobilize them for the work of empire. Anne’s story through the eight novels, that is, is feminist precisely because it narrativizes a young Anglo-Celtic Canadian girl’s choice of motherhood, as a duty, as a vocation, and as a profession. Anne does not give up writing because she is not good at it, although she does belittle her work in a Jane Austen-esque way in the *House*

of *Dreams*, describing it as “pretty, fanciful little sketches” for children (*AHD* 19), not to be compared with the muscular and manly work of Owen Ford or even Paul Irving. Anne gives up writing because she sees her work as the production of “living” books. Her path is thus not represented in the series itself as a “decline,” although so many readers have, like Gillian Thomas, seen the narrative’s trajectory in this light: her path is to be understood as progressive, her taking up of motherhood as a professional decision. Anne actually turns out to be exactly the kind of mother-woman whom McClung would represent for her whole career as the “white hope” for “the race,” instinctively maternal, motivated by duty, improving the world as and with their children.

Describing the kind of “trained motherly and tactful women” she imagined working for “the department of social welfare, paid for by the school board,” to instruct young girls about pregnancy and birth control, McClung noted that “many mothers are ignorant, foolish, lax, and certainly untrained” (*In Times* 133). The foregrounding of a perceived need for the education of “ignorant” mothers, in part through the institutionalization of mothercraft, is a primary objective of McClung’s feminism, which aims to remind women as well as men of the “natural” caregiving qualities of women, the “normal” desire to have children and to care for them, and of the urgent necessity of this — according to McClung, largely untapped — maternal resource for the advancement of “the race.” “The woman movement,” according to McClung, should be understood to be “a spiritual revival of the best instincts of womanhood — the instinct to serve and save the race” (*In Times* 100). The awakening of this instinct in women is a crucial didactic object of McClung’s in the Pearlle Watson trilogy, as in so much of her fiction: it is also a similarly crucial object of Montgomery’s in the Anne stories — and well beyond. Indeed, it is possible to see most of Montgomery’s fiction undertaking two fundamentally didactic and definitively maternalist projects. First, it repeatedly and consistently constitutes heroines who are characterized by their inherent motherliness. Anne is joined, notably, but not only, by Pat of Silver Bush (1933-35) and Jane of Lantern Hill (1937), who are clearly committed to the values of domesticity and the directing of surplus maternal energy upon the community. Even Emily of New Moon is only offered fulfilment with the return of Teddy Kent: without home and children, as Janet Royal makes clear to Emily, and as Anne comes to see early in her story, success for women is to be seen to be a hollow thing.

Montgomery’s second maternalist gesture is as pervasive and ideological, in its almost certainly unavoidable interpellation or identificatory “hailing” of girl readers as maternal subjects-to-be: it is also a crucial point at which her work connects with McClung’s.¹⁵ As in McClung’s Watson trilogy, there is little in Montgomery’s longer work which does not undertake to foreground good mothers — or mother figures — by juxtaposing them

with bad ones. McClung deploys this strategy in *Sowing Seeds in Danny*, first, when she exposes the disjunction between Mrs. J. Burton Francis's ideas of mothering and her application of her "theories," and then when she draws attention to the shortcomings of the unmotherly Mrs. Motherwell. In both of these instances, it is Pearlie's superior mothering skills that make the "bad" mothering so apparent. Montgomery uses a similar methodology. In the first novel, Anne (and the girl reader) negotiate a range of models representing good and bad maternalism: Marilla, who finds her untapped maternalism through Anne's touch, is contrasted with Anne's previous caregivers and with Mrs. Peter Blewett; Marilla is joined by Mrs. Allan and Miss Stacey as mother figures who point Anne in the direction she will follow through the seven subsequent instalments. In *Anne of Ingleside* (1939), the last instalment which Montgomery would write, Anne's own good maternalism is juxtaposed with the lack of mother-love in Christine Stuart who speaks in a "hard" voice: "I'm afraid I'm not the maternal type. I really never thought that it was woman's sole mission to bring children into an already overcrowded world" (AI 310). Since this has been Anne's "sole mission," we cannot but see her comments as reminding us once again that there is little space in the world Montgomery constructs for women who are not the "maternal type."

The contrasting of good and bad mothers which we see in the Anne books is similarly taken up in other novels: *Jane of Lantern Hill* and the Emily books likewise draw attention to the effects upon the two heroines of their maternal caregivers and their success or failure at nurturing the next generation of mothers. Even in the late 1920s and early '30s, the distinction between good and bad mothers — or between women who follow their maternal "instinct" and those who do not — is arguably the point upon which her fiction pivots. The Pat books and *Jane of Lantern Hill* are both profoundly domestic and maternal. The 1929 novel, *Magic for Marigold*, is a text in which "mothercraft" is actually invoked as a discourse of educated and "scientific" maternalism, represented for Marigold by her aunt Marigold (MM 273). The 1931 "grown-up" work, *A Tangled Web*, foregrounds the differences between Nan — a "new woman" — and Gay Penhallow as signs of their suitability to reproduce the race. What is clear is that Montgomery, like McClung, was engaged in an ideological work of narrativizing maternal "duty," her own "duty" as a writer closely resembling that of the early story, "to help her readers to higher planes of thought and endeavour." Montgomery's Anne books thus ought to be situated, with the novels which McClung was producing at the same time, in relation to the ideologies of first-wave feminism which they are reproducing. In both the Anne books and the Pearlie Watson series, girls in English Canada are being presented with models of imperial maternalism and, in effect, are being inculcated into imperialism's increasing interest in professionalizing motherhood not only as a "duty," but as a "domestic science" practically applied. In both series what we see is a model mother-woman whose object is to teach young girl

readers how, as McClung puts it, to “think.”

As is the case elsewhere in the Empire, the increased prominence of the imperial mother in Canada in the first decade of the twentieth century can be traced in a range of ways, all of which can be seen as ideological, working to interpellate white women as imperial subjects whose constructed “duty” to reproduce accorded them a particular value and privilege in the context of the period’s expansionism. It is also possible to see the rise of the imperial mother in an increased emphasis upon inculcating children into a gendered culture of empire-building: it is well known that Baden-Powell founded the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides after the Boer War crisis, in the hope that the Empire could be saved by improving the next generation through physical and moral education. Little boys were to grow up to be better soldiers than the previous generation of young men had proved to be; little girls were to become better mothers than the women who had produced the soldiers of the 1890s. In English Canada, where the ideas of maternalism were finding such purchase in the context of the expansionist west, the ideological work of teaching girls to be good “mothers of the race” is discernible in the formation of numerous organizations, such as the Girl Guides, the Canadian Girls in Training, and the Girls’ Friendly Society. It is evident in the new emphasis in the early twentieth century on the teaching in elementary and high schools of “physical culture” and domestic science. It also underpins the emergence of a new imperial genre of fiction which was based, like Montgomery’s and McClung’s, in a discourse of educated maternalism, and which worked to “sow seeds” of race, gender, empire and duty in the next generation.

Notes

- 1 Gerson addresses this issue in two articles, cited here.
- 2 Butler fought for many years for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, which had been passed 1864, 1868 and 1869 in an effort to regulate prostitution and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. The Acts made it possible to submit any woman suspected of prostitution to an internal physical examination for signs of disease. See, for instance, Judith Walkowitz’s discussion of Butler and her work against regulation in *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*.
- 3 McClung, like other feminists of the period, notes the implications of the Boer War, pointing out in *In Times Like These* that “the British War Office had to lower the standard for the army because not enough men could be found to measure up to the previous standard, and an investigation was made into the causes which had led to the physical deterioration of the race” (166).
- 4 The phrase is used by Ernest Thompson Seton in an article published in the immigrationist magazine, *Canada West*.
- 5 See Cecily Devereux, “New Woman, New World: Maternal Feminism and the New Imperialism in the White Settler Colonies.”

- 6 See, for instance, a recent report on the front page of the *National Post* (A1; B12) which makes reference to work done by David Howes and Constance Classen on similarities between *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* and *Anne of Green Gables*. See Classen's article in issue #55 of *CCL* which first noted this theory.
- 7 MacMillan also notes that Montgomery and McClung have "maintained their hold [only] as producers of paraliterature in the subgenres of children's fiction and social polemic" (208).
- 8 Randi R. Warne's *Literature as Pulpit* marks a new academic interest in McClung, as does the University of Toronto reprint edition of *Purple Springs* and the University of Ottawa *Stories Subversive*, edited by one of McClung's most recent biographers, Marilyn Davis. For a review and analysis of recent shifts in the study of McClung, see Janice Fiamengo's extremely useful article, "A Legacy of Ambivalence: Response to Nellie McClung."
- 9 For a fuller discussion of the maternal trajectory of the Anne novels, see Cecily Devereux, "'Not One of Those Dreadful New Women': Anne Shirley and the Culture of Imperial Motherhood."
- 10 The theories of Mrs. Francis, we are to see, are not applicable to the real problems of the Watson family: she lectures about "motherhood" to Mrs. Watson, but does not recognize, until she is taught otherwise by Pearlie, that the work of "mothering" as McClung presents it is a practical extension of the work of caring for children at home. Maternalism, as it is presented in *Sowing Seeds in Danny*, situates women as social caregivers, and society (or significant portions of it) as children needing care.
A figure not unlike Mrs. Francis appears in Montgomery's fiction: in *Anne of Ingleside* Mrs. Parker is engaged in similar work, writing an "Institute paper on 'Misunderstood Children'" (49), while ignoring her own. Her theories are presented as "encrusted" because they are not based on experience or practice. Jennifer Litster has pointed out to me that Montgomery makes a similar suggestion about contemporary theories of motherhood in the short story, "Penelope Struts Her Theories."
- 11 For example, Freud's theories of femininity and the Oedipal phase for boys are arguably invested in an ideology of reproduction: women who do not want children are "neurotic."
- 12 This poem ends with an image of domestic harmony: on concluding the story of the woman who marries the farmer, the narrator takes the position that,

... musing on the tale I heard,
 'T were well, thought I, if often
 To rugged farm-life came the gift
 To harmonize and soften;

If more and more we found the troth
 Of fact and fancy plighted,
 And culture's charm and labor's strength
 In rural homes united,—

The simple life, the homely hearth,
 With beauty's sphere surrounding,
 And blessing toil where toil abounds
 With graces more abounding. (89)

- 13 Anne uses this phrase in *Anne of Ingleside*, when Christine Stuart asks if she has given up writing. "Not altogether ... but I'm writing living epistles now" (312).
- 14 Montgomery did not especially like McClung. After attending a dinner held in honour of McClung by the Canadian Authors' Association in 1921, Montgomery wrote disparagingly of McClung in her journal, observing that although "handsome," she was "glib of tongue," making "a speech full of obvious platitudes and amusing little stories which made everyone laugh and deluded us into thinking it was quite a fine thing — until we began to think it over" (25). The two women did not correspond regularly.
- 15 French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser uses the term "in order to explain how ideology constitutes and 'centres' subjects in the social world" (*Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory* 566): "[T]he human subject is given back, through ideology, an imaginary construction of his own autonomy, unity, and self-preservation. [Althusser] argues that ideology 'recruits' individuals and transforms them, through the 'ideological recognition function,' into subject. This recognition function is the process of interpellation: ideology 'interpellates' or 'hails' individuals, that is, addresses itself directly to them.... All hailed individuals, recognizing or misrecognizing themselves in the address, are transformed into subjects conceiving of themselves as free and autonomous members of society that has in fact constructed them" (Ross King, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory* 577). See Louis Althusser (127-86).

Works Cited

- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books, 1977. 127-86.
- Berg, Temma F. "Anne of Green Gables: A Girl's Reading." *Such a Simple Little Tale: Critical Responses to L.M. Montgomery's Anne of Green Gables*. Ed. Mavis Reimer. Metuchen, NJ, and London: The Children's Literature Association and the Scarecrow P, 1992. 153-64.
- Davin, Anna. "Imperialism and Motherhood." *History Workshop Journal* 5 (1978): 9-65.
- Devereux, Cecily. "New Woman, New World: Maternal Feminism and the New Imperialism in the White Settler Colonies." *Women's Studies International Forum* 22.2 (1999): 175-84.
- . "Not One of Those Dreadful New Women': Anne Shirley and the Culture of Imperial Motherhood." *Canadian Children's Literature: Reappraisals*. University of Ottawa P (forthcoming).
- Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*. Ed. Irene R. Makaryk. Toronto, 1993.
- Fiamengo, Janice. "A Legacy of Ambivalence: Response to Nellie McClung." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 34.4 (1999): 70-87.
- Gerson, Carole. "Anthologies and the Canon of Early Canadian Women Writers." *Rediscovering Our Foremothers: Nineteenth-Century Canadian Women Writers*. Ed. Lorraine McMullen. Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1990. 55-76.
- . "The Canon between the Wars: Field-notes of a Feminist Literary Archaeologist." *Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value*. Ed. Robert Lecker. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1991. 46-56.
- Gillen, Mollie. *The Wheel of Things: A Biography of L.M. Montgomery*. Don Mills, ON: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1975.
- Kornfield, Eve, and Susan Jackson. "The Female Bildungsroman in Nineteenth-Century

- America: Parameters of a Vision." *Such a Simple Little Tale: Critical Responses to L.M. Montgomery's Anne of Green Gables.*" Ed. Mavis Reimer. Metuchen, NJ, and London: The Children's Literature Association and the Scarecrow P, 1992. 139-52.
- Logan, J.D., and Donald French. *Highways of Canadian Literature: A Synoptic Introduction to the Literary History of Canada (English) from 1760 to 1924.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1924.
- MacLulich, T.D. "L.M. Montgomery's Portraits of the Artist: Realism, Idealism, and the Domestic Imagination." *English Studies in Canada* 11.4 (1985): 459-73.
- MacMillan, Carrie, Lorraine McMullen, and Elizabeth Waterston. *Silenced Sextet: Six Nineteenth-Century Canadian Women Novelists.* Montreal and Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's UP, 1992.
- McClung, Nellie L. *Sowing Seeds in Danny.* Toronto: Briggs, 1908.
- . *In Times Like These.* Toronto: McLeod and Allen, 1915.
- . *Purple Springs.* 1921. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992.
- . *The Stream Runs Fast.* Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1945.
- . *Stories Subversive.* Ed. Marilyn Davis. U of Ottawa P.
- Montgomery, L.M. "At the Bay Shore Farm." *Against the Odds: Tales of Achievement.* Ed. Rea Wilmshurst. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993.
- . *Anne of Green Gables.* 1908. Toronto: McClelland Bantam, nd.
- . *Anne of Avonlea.* 1909. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976.
- . *The Alpine Path: The Story of My Career.* 1917. Markham, ON: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1997.
- . *Anne's House of Dreams.* 1922. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972.
- . *Magic for Marigold.* 1929. Toronto: McClelland Bantam, 1988.
- . *A Tangled Web.* 1931. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972.
- . *Jane of Lantern Hill.* 1937. Toronto: McClelland Bantam, 1988.
- . *Anne of Ingleside.* 1939. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972.
- . "Penelope Struts Her Theories." *The Road to Yesterday.* Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1974. 131-74.
- National Post* 10 Apr. 1999.
- Reimer, Mavis, ed. *Such a Simple Little Tale: Critical Responses to L.M. Montgomery's Anne of Green Gables.* Metuchen, NJ, and London: Children's Literature Association and the Scarecrow P, 1992.
- Rothwell, Erika. "Knitting Up the World: L.M. Montgomery and Maternal Feminism in Canada." *L.M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture.* Ed. Irene Gammel and Elizabeth Epperly. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1999. 133-144.
- Seton, Ernest Thompson. *Canada West* 3.6 (1908): 525-532.
- Thomas, Gillian. "The Decline of Anne: Matron vs. Child." *Such a Simple Little Tale: Critical Responses to L.M. Montgomery's Anne of Green Gables.* Ed. Mavis Reimer. Metuchen, NJ, and London: Children's Literature Association and the Scarecrow P, 1992. 23-8.
- Walkowitz, Judith. *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London.* Chicago, 1992. 90-93.
- Warne, Randi R. *Literature as Pulpit: The Christian Social Activism of Nellie L. McClung.* Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1993.
- Whittier, John Greenleaf. "Among the Hills." *The Complete Poetical Works of Whittier.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1894. 83-89.
- Woodsworth, James S. *Strangers within Our Gates, or Coming Canadians.* 1909. Ed. and intro Marilyn Barber. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1972.

Cecily Devereux is an assistant professor in the Department of English at the University of Alberta, specializing in English-Canadian literature of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. She has published a number of articles on questions of feminism and imperialism in women's writing in Canada.