

“The Golden Road of Youth”: L.M. Montgomery and British Children’s Books

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Résumé : Cet article s’interroge sur le lien entre deux ouvrages de Kenneth Grahame, *The Golden Age* et *Dream Days*, et deux romans de L.M. Montgomery, *La Conteuse* et *La Route enchantée*. L’étude comparative de ces quatre œuvres fait ressortir une évolution dans la carrière de L.M. Montgomery : ses deux romans marquent un rejet des modèles littéraires américains en faveur d’une évocation arcadienne de l’enfance à l’anglaise. En s’écarter de la formule d’*Anne . . . La Maison aux pignons verts*, la romancière, partie à la recherche d’un nouveau lectorat, a découvert de nouvelles façons d’exprimer l’identité de l’Île-du-Prince-Édouard et du Canada anglais.

Summary: This paper explores the relationship between Kenneth Grahame’s *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days* and L.M. Montgomery’s *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road*. By comparing each author’s description of childhood, the paper identifies developments in Montgomery’s work. It argues that the two *Story Girl* books are witness to Montgomery’s rejection of American literary models in favour of British ones and, in particular, British evocations of an Arcadian childhood. Montgomery may have sought different readers by diverting from the *Anne of Green Gables* formula; in the process, she found new ways to articulate Prince Edward Island and Canadian identity.

“It’s no wonder we can’t understand the grown-ups,” said the *Story Girl* indignantly, “because we’ve never been grown-up ourselves. But *they* have been children, and so I don’t see why they don’t understand us.”

— L.M. Montgomery, *The Story Girl* (206)

Every Christmas for almost 40 years, L.M. Montgomery exchanged books with her Scottish correspondent, the Alloa-based journalist George Boyd MacMillan. Naturally enough, they each mailed books that they felt the other would like, but, more often than not, they specifically sought out books that could export a flavour of their own country and culture. Maud Montgomery sent George MacMillan Canadian bestsellers like Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* (1925); Canadian poetry by Marjorie Pickthall, Wilson Macdonald, and Ethelwyn Wetherald; books about the Maritime Provinces, like Archibald MacMechan's *Ultima Thule* (1927); and stories of Canadian life, such as Helen Williams's *Spinning Wheels and Homespun* (1923) and F.P. Grove's *Over Prairie Trails* (1922). For his part, MacMillan sent Montgomery material on various Scottish themes, including volumes by a variety of Scottish writers, such as Ian Hay, Janet Beith, and Neil Gunn. He posted books about nature and gardening, books that reminded him of Montgomery's writing (Flora Klickmann's *Flower Patch* series, for example), and British works that were unobtainable or unheard of in Canada.

One such book was Kenneth Grahame's *The Golden Age*, which MacMillan enclosed in his Christmas parcel of 1909. Grahame's landmark idyll of childhood, first published in 1895, was new to Montgomery: she told MacMillan she did not believe that it and its sequel *Dream Days* (1898), which she soon acquired, were "known on this side of the pond at all" (Unpublished letter, 1 Sept. 1910). The delight she expressed with these British books must have been tangible, for in 1913 MacMillan gave Montgomery the book for which Grahame is best remembered today, *The Wind in the Willows* (1908). Montgomery shared her love of this children's classic with her own sons: she described it as "the most charming fairy tale in the world," which she had read "a score of times and could read . . . as many more" (Unpublished journal entry, 7 May 1937).

In September 1910, nine months after receiving *The Golden Age* from Scotland, L.M. Montgomery completed work on *The Story Girl* (1911). Some contemporary critics noted the similarities between this novel and its sequel *The Golden Road* (1913) and Grahame's *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days*. In a journal entry of 1 March 1930, Montgomery included Kenneth Grahame's name on the long list of authors to whom she had been compared during her career (*Selected Journals* IV 40). Moreover, Maud Montgomery recognized this likeness herself: in 1910, she told MacMillan that her fourth novel — which she considered superior "from a literary point of view" to *Anne of Green Gables* — had something in common with *Dream Days* (Unpublished letter, 1 Sept. 1910).

It is important to state from the outset that L.M. Montgomery was not aping Kenneth Grahame's books. Her rudimentary plans for *The Story Girl* took shape several months before she read *The Golden Age*, and she drew her inspiration for the book from her childhood and from her memories of two orphan boys, Wellington and David Nelson, who boarded at her

Cavendish home when she was aged seven to ten. Besides, it seems not unlikely that Montgomery's synopsis of *The Story Girl's* proposed outline — "It is to be about children and will have very little plot" (Unpublished letter to MacMillan, 29 Aug. 1909) — suggested to MacMillan the idea of sending her *The Golden Age* in the first place. There are, as will be seen, several important differences between the two sets of books. Nevertheless, there are also interesting parallels between the depictions of a Prince Edward Island childhood in *The Story Girl* and a Home Counties childhood in *The Golden Age*: indeed, Montgomery's echo of Grahame's title in *The Golden Road* seems intentional.

This paper foregrounds a comparison between these two pairs of books about childhood as the foundation of a wider discussion of Montgomery's development as a Canadian writer. While there are clearly valuable critical insights to be made from studying Montgomery's books in conjunction with those that they remind us of, these insights are particularly productive in cases where Montgomery herself noted the comparison. She was always quick to identify parallels with — not to mention borrowings from — previous works. From the early days of her career, which involved writing pot-boilers and poems, sometimes to order, for religious periodicals, farming journals, and children's magazines, Montgomery learned that financial rewards came from studying the form of her colleagues and competitors. She was acutely aware of the demands of genre, of the market, and later of her fans. Therefore, literary connections can potentially reveal self-conscious developments in her literary style and direction.

By way of example, Montgomery's early short stories were often expressly "written to suit the American taste" (Unpublished letter to MacMillan, 12 Jan. 1905). In the 1890s, Canada had few periodicals with reasonable rates of payment and only a small national book market compared to the United States. To Americanize Canadian material was a sensible tactic for a fledgling author to pursue, especially an author who had to strike a balance between artistic inclination and earning a living. Montgomery did not expand on the practical measures she took to tailor her stories to the "American taste" — using an ambiguous North American setting or subjects peculiar to North America, for example, or perhaps obeying American literary conventions — but these modifications were enough for her to doubt that her stories were "suitable" for British periodicals (Unpublished letter to MacMillan, 12 Jan. 1905). In time, she approached only American publishers (in New York, Boston, and Indianapolis) with the manuscript of *Anne of Green Gables* (1908).¹ Studies that link Montgomery's first published novel to American classics such as *Little Women*, *What Katy Did*, *The Girl of the Limberlost*, and in particular *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* all demonstrate that *Anne of Green Gables* has much in common with a type of children's book produced in the United States (see Thomas; Berke; Kornfeld and Jackson; Classen; Dawson). Indeed, as Cecily

Devereux points out, the Anne Shirley series is “often accepted as part of the American canon of children’s literature, in spite of its Canadian origin” (18).

Montgomery’s early stories regularly focus on youngsters with “grown-up” obligations and concerns, such as caring for elderly relatives or working to help pay foreclosed mortgages, features associated with American child-life in literature and at odds with the “English style of family story” where, as Gillian Avery argues, childhood is more usually “sheltered” and “leisurely” (168). American childhood, Avery explains, was rarely secluded from the adult world in literature of the late Victorian and Edwardian period. Additionally, American authors for children were expected to keep “a much closer grip on reality” than were their British counterparts (211). But, as this paper will demonstrate, *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road* describe childhood in quite a different way. They share with Booth Tarkington’s *Penrod* (1914) something Avery describes as a “rarity” in U.S. children’s fiction, “a background in which it is possible to be dreamy and detached” (212). And just as Anne Shirley’s Stateside literary cousins can enhance our understanding of the cultural impact of *Anne of Green Gables*, so the special relationship between Britain and Canada witnessed in *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road* develops our knowledge of Montgomery’s place in the history of both Canadian literature and children’s literature.

The Path to Arcady

The gods were not all beautiful, you know. And, beautiful or not, nobody ever wanted to meet them face to face. (*Story Girl* 136)

The Golden Age had its origin in Kenneth Grahame’s 1891 essay “The Olympians” and the impact its opening sentence had on poet and editor W.E. Henley. “Looking back to those days of old, ere the gate shut behind me,” Grahame’s essay begins, “I can see now that to children with the proper equipment of parents these things would have worn a different aspect” (19). Henley suggested to Grahame that his meditation on a childhood spent among indifferent adults (the “Olympians” of the title) would lend itself to a longer, narrative excursion.

The two books that followed — “The Olympians” forms a prologue to the first — chart the adventures of five orphans who are fostered by their aunts and uncles in a large country house. Harold, Selina, Edward, Charlotte, and the anonymous male narrator inhabit their own imaginative world of fairy tales and classical mythology, pets and toys, and the quest for pocket money. More a series of essays than novels, *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days* invoke a rural idyll where children have a special vision and most adults — excepting the odd eccentric bachelor and artist — are unsympathetic, hostile, and, from the child’s point of view, hopelessly misinformed. “In

my tales about children," Grahame later reflected, "I have tried to show that their simple acceptance of the mood of wonderment, their readiness to welcome a perfect miracle at any hour of the day or night, is a thing more precious than any of the laboured acquisitions of adult mankind" (qtd. in Peter Green 356).

Montgomery's *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road* chart the adventures of eight children, five of whom are orphaned in some way,² who live and work with a host of aunts and uncles on a Prince Edward Island farm. The children inhabit their own imaginative world of myths and local legends, pets and books, and (as this is a Scots-Presbyterian community in Canada) the quest for church and school funds. Although not unpleasant, the aunts and uncles are all busy farmers who want only limited contact with the small fry. Because these adults lack imagination and have little empathy for their young charges, their child-rearing systems can occasion minor hurts and even induce full-scale panic. As with Grahame's *Dream Days*, *The Golden Road* departs from the idyll, bathed (in the words of male narrator Beverley King) in "the shadow of change" (*Golden Road* 213). In this book, the boundary between the worlds of child and adult becomes blurred; the golden summer ends.

At a basic level, the parallels between the *Story Girl* books and Grahame's books are clear. Both are adaptations of a formula Humphrey Carpenter describes as prevalent in the golden age of British children's literature, a formula of "a family of children able to conduct their lives with very little adult supervision" (132). Both Montgomery and Grahame envisage two separate worlds of "children and upgrown people" (*Golden Age* 44), a distinction that for Grahame was first made in childhood. To describe the world of children, both authors chiefly write from a child's perspective and stylistically combine this journey into childhood — the path to Arcady — with an adult lament for a childhood lost. Both Grahame and Montgomery were ideologically rooted in the Romantic beliefs that children were blessed with uncommon insight, that the incidents of childhood were precious and vital in themselves, and that adults should be guided by remembrance of earlier days. For each author — as for William Wordsworth before them — these sentiments could best be conveyed in writing that was more episodic than plot-driven, writing that captured childhood's formative "spots of time."

For all these parallels, there are important differences between the two pairs of books. Most noticeably, Montgomery's books are more accessible than Grahame's. Although each author uses a reflective voice that is occasionally intrusive and seems designed to speak to adult readers, Montgomery's stories include many more episodes that in action and in tone will entertain younger readers. Grahame's books do not: in the words of the Welsh poet Vernon Watkins, "One cannot for a moment accept *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days* as children's books. Wherever they are found in the juvenile section of a library, they are mistakenly placed there" (vii). Sec-

ondly, Montgomery's "Olympians" are more rounded and sympathetic characters than Grahame's: although as readers we may sometimes hold their actions in contempt, Beverley King rarely expresses his scorn with quite the incredulity and bitterness that Grahame's narrator does. (Such was the vehemence of Grahame's attack on adult sensibilities that his books met with disapproval from some humourless Victorian reviewers.) Montgomery's aunts and uncles may occupy a separate world — a fact repeatedly emphasized by their segregation as "grown-ups," in the sense of Sara Stanley's comment that "It's really dreadful to have no grown-ups that you can depend on" (*Story Girl* 148) — but there are more intersections between the grown-up and child worlds than in Grahame's books. This is especially apparent in *The Golden Road*: as its title implies, this sequel leads somewhere. For the older child characters, this journey will involve travelling the road from childhood to adulthood, from summer to the first days of autumn.

These intersections result partly from the practical proscriptions placed on a secluded childhood in Montgomery's Canadian agricultural setting: a character like Peter Craig, who works as a hired boy on the King family farm, cannot afford the luxury of a life spent entirely in play. In addition to this social realism, the class and age backgrounds of the children in *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road* permit a greater diversity in child experience and character. Whereas Grahame's children, for all their individual passions and preoccupations, share a certain philosophical grace, Montgomery's Sara Ray uses her imagination principally to fuel her hysterical dread of punishment and disaster, and Felicity King's playfulness is always tempered by her awareness of social etiquette. This is increasingly also the case with Grahame's Selina, but a last difference between the two pairs of books would be that, although no ages are given for Grahame's child protagonists, they are markedly younger than the King cousins and their friends in the *Story Girl* books, who are all aged eleven and upward.

There seem to be few parallels between the lives of L.M. Montgomery (1874-1942) and Kenneth Grahame (1859-1932) at the time they wrote these books. Grahame, of upper-middle-class background, worked for the Bank of England and was appointed Secretary of this institution in 1898. Although Grahame, like W.E. Henley, was a mover in London's literary circles — Grahame's cousin Anthony Hope wrote *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1894), a book Maud Montgomery read "every two or three years" (*Selected Journals IV* [15 July 1933] 226) — he was principally known only as the author of light essays published in journals such as *The Yellow Book* and the *St. James Gazette*. By 1910, Montgomery had scored international success with *Anne of Green Gables* and its first sequel, *Anne of Avonlea* (1909): her work on *The Story Girl* was punctuated by a three-week trip to Boston, where she was entertained by her publisher and lionized by the American public. Nevertheless, Montgomery was living an increasingly isolated life socially, and

her private journal from this period is tinged with depression and a sense of impending loss. With her grandmother Macneill in deteriorating physical and mental health, Montgomery knew that her remaining time in her Cavendish home was limited: on her grandmother's death the farm would pass to a male relative. One similarity that we might find between the two authors at this time — and it is not an unimportant one — is that both, when well into their 30s, were about to depart from the single life: Kenneth Grahame married Elspeth Thomson in 1899; Maud Montgomery married Ewan Macdonald in 1911. Neither marriage was to prove a happy one.

If we look farther back into childhood, however, the similarities between the two writers are more profound. Kenneth Grahame was a Scot by birth, born in Edinburgh in 1859. Like Scots-descended Maud Montgomery, Grahame's mother died when he was a small child (Grahame was five, Montgomery less than two) and, like Montgomery, he (with his siblings) was sent by his father (a lawyer and an alcoholic) to live with an English grandmother. We might compare the observation of Grahame's biographer Peter Green on Grahame's childhood — "There was no cruelty in the positive sense, merely emotional deprivation of a rather subtle kind" (17) — with Montgomery's description of her own childhood: although not "actually unhappy," it "was never as happy as childhood should be and as it easily might have been" (*Selected Journals* I [2 Jan. 1905] 301). In fiction, Montgomery and Grahame would invoke memories of their powerlessness in the face of an autocratic adult regime (for each, real grandparents would translate into fictional aunts and uncles) and also their memories of the imaginative world — in Montgomery's case "the world of nature and the world of books" (*Selected Journals* I 301) — in which they constructed a kind of happiness despite circumstances that might have proved rather more unhappy.

Importantly, literary rewards could come with an authentic return to childhood's imaginative realm. *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days* are often credited with being the first books to take a child's standpoint "as the main theme of a book intended for adult reading" (Lewis ix). In the words of Roger Lancelyn Green,

The Golden Age suddenly presented childhood as a thing in itself: a good thing, a joyous thing — a new world to be explored, a new species to be observed and described. Suddenly children were not being written down to anymore — they were being written up: you were enjoying the Spring for itself, not looking on it anxiously as a prelude to summer. (44-45)

Grahame's books were highly influential on late Victorian and Edwardian children's writers such as Rudyard Kipling, Edith Nesbit, and J.M. Barrie, all of whom were bent on escaping the piety and didacticism of their predecessors and were instrumental in cementing critical respect for children's books.

In this context, it is vital that L.M. Montgomery considered *The Story Girl* to be “the best piece of work I have yet done. It may not be as popular as *Anne* — somehow I don’t fancy it will. But from a literary point of view it is far ahead of it” (*Selected Journals* II [29 Nov. 1910] 20). Her confidence in *The Story Girl*’s literary credentials raises two important and interrelated questions. If Montgomery believed *The Story Girl* to be a more sophisticated piece of literature than *Anne of Green Gables* — a work she famously if disingenuously referred to as “a simple little tale” (*Selected Journals* I [15 Oct. 1908] 339) — would it appeal to a greater number of discriminating and mature readers? And if it could, was *The Story Girl* (and by implication *The Golden Road*) specifically designed to appeal to this class of readers? In other words, when planning and writing *The Story Girl* and its sequel, did Montgomery consciously effect changes in her style in order to take her work to more adult readers and in turn elevate her literary standing?

The remainder of this paper, in comparing Montgomery’s *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road* to Grahame’s *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days*, will explore some of the issues that these questions raise. At this stage, however, it is important to recognize that hand-in-hand with the popular success of *Anne of Green Gables*, particularly with girl readers, came some pitfalls. Montgomery gained a loyal readership and with this the promise of continuing financial returns, but she also faced the prospect of being tied to one character and to a convention that might smother her creativity. As each sequel became a paler imitation of the first success, girls’ series frequently descended into spiralling mediocrity, like the “Little Colonel” books of Montgomery’s L.C. Page stable-mate Annie Fellows Johnstone (for a wider discussion, see Gerson). In any case, Montgomery was always a somewhat reluctant children’s writer. Unlike Grahame, who wrote *The Wind in the Willows* for his son Alistair, Montgomery did not write books for her children, nor did she dedicate any of her novels to them. To enhance her literary standing with the many adult readers and reviewers who had praised *Anne of Green Gables*, it seems conceivable that, in this hiatus from the *Anne* series, Montgomery might experiment with other forms; if so, then as an alternative to catering for the “American taste,” it is also conceivable that Montgomery would turn to British models for inspiration, especially where these models had cultivated a track record in earning respect from the literary establishment.

Et in Arcadia ego

“What a yarn!” said Dan, drawing a long breath, when we had come to ourselves and discovered that we really were sitting in a dewy Prince Edward Island orchard instead of watching two lovers on a mountain in Thessaly in the Golden Age. “I don’t believe a word of it.” (*Story Girl* 137)

In an undated newspaper article titled "How I Became a Writer," Montgomery remarked of her own childhood, "I had, in my imagination, a passport to fairyland. In a twinkling I could whisk myself into regions of wonderful adventures, unhampered by any restrictions of reality" ("Scrapbook of Reviews"). Although a number of Montgomery's child characters, most notably Marigold Lesley in *Magic for Marigold* (1929), would share her passport to fairyland, it is debatable that Anne Shirley truly does. Anne is unquestionably an imaginative child who is ever poised to shake prosaic Avonlea from her feet, but the same capacity for escapism that initially ensures her psychological survival in Nova Scotia is continually thwarted by reality in Prince Edward Island. In imaginative fantasies such as the episode of the Haunted Wood, Anne must learn to be content with the commonplace (*Anne of Green Gables* 191): the novel is, after all, an exercise in belonging. *Anne of Green Gables* is set in a world where the lives of adults and children are intertwined, where the action stems from intrigues in the schoolhouse or the Presbyterian Church, and where the novel works toward Anne's growing maturity and her acceptance into the adoptive family and community. In a world governed by the Protestant work ethic and a need to keep busy, little allowance is made for the leisure time in which to be a child. Anne's excursions into fairyland are confined to the "odd half-hours which she was allowed for play" (*Anne of Green Gables* 79).

By contrast, the King cousins in the *Story Girl* books enjoy the luxury of "long hours for play" (*Story Girl* 25). Unlike Anne Shirley, these children have few domestic or farming responsibilities and even the winter months in *The Golden Road*, when the exploits might reasonably involve school-based action, have a holiday atmosphere. Whereas Anne's upbringing is a matter of some urgency, to Marilla if not always to Anne herself, the six King cousins are permitted time to grow. Although *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road* explore some of childhood's spats and spites, these books more often celebrate the companionship between a welter of child characters who find a physical and imaginative shelter in the King family orchard. Within this enclosed and safe haven, the boys and girls are removed from adult concerns and their innocence is protected. Indeed, from the outset of the first book Aunt Olivia King's flower garden is linked with a prelapsarian Eden: "I think I could always be good if I lived in a garden all the time," the *Story Girl* reflects (*Story Girl* 22).

Planted out with fruit trees that mark the birth of family members, the celebration of family festivals, and the visits of beloved friends, the "famous King orchard" (*Story Girl* 8) unfurls the branches of the King clan and establishes the roots of their history. It is therefore no accident that Felix and Beverley King are taken through the latched gate that separates the farmyard from the orchard by their cousin Sara Stanley, whose flair for storytelling bridges the gap between the mundane present and the halloved past. This chapter, "Legends of the Old Orchard," welcomes the

Toronto visitors into the family circle by locating their birthday trees; it also whisks them into another, more Technicolor world, one that reveals the "tales of wonder" (*Story Girl* 23), the "glamour of old family traditions" that lend "magic to all sights and sounds around" (*Story Girl* 5-6). Moreover, the *Story Girl* compares the orchard idyll with "a dream of fairyland" (*Story Girl* 17), an enchantment that, once discovered, can permeate their daily lives. The fairyland that Montgomery explores in *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road* lends credibility to ancient superstition, is anchored in history, and is synonymous with childhood perception. In all three areas, there is a marked influence on Montgomery of British children's writers, not only Grahame but also Lewis Carroll, Kipling, Nesbit, George MacDonald, and Robert Louis Stevenson.

It is in the last of these concepts of fairyland that the links between Montgomery and Grahame are clearest. As Beverley King observes, in one of his most syrupy indulgences:

There is such a place as fairyland — but only children can find the way to it. And they do not know that it is fairyland until they have grown so old that they forget the way. One bitter day when they seek it and cannot find it, they realize what they have lost; and that is the tragedy of life. On that day the gates of Eden are shut behind them and the age of gold is over. Henceforth they must dwell in the common light of common day. Only a few who remain children at heart can ever find that fair, lost path again; and blessed are they above mortals. They, and only they, can bring us tidings from that dear country where once we sojourned and from which we must evermore be exiles. The world calls them its singers and poets and story-tellers; but they are just people who have never forgotten the way to fairyland. (*Story Girl* 121)

As Montgomery's use of the phrase "age of gold" suggests, the link with Grahame is partly stylistic. Carpenter has remarked of *The Golden Age* that "the prose is sometimes irritatingly ornate" (119), and the same charge can be levelled at Montgomery. For example, both authors, when their narrators are at their most sentimental, use the biblical phrase "I trow not" (*Story Girl* 160; *Golden Age* 22), an archaism somewhat incongruous in books for children and a further indication that these books were intended for adult readers. In Montgomery's case, the witty and ironic narrator of *Anne of Green Gables* is ousted by an elegiac and nostalgic voice that echoes Grahame's philosophy that "grown-up people are fairly correct on matters of fact; it is in the higher gift of imagination that they are so sadly to seek" (*Golden Age* 45) yet also allows certain adults access to this "mood of wonderment." Grahame and Montgomery agree that "children and artists alone are visionaries" (Wullschläger 153): we might compare Grahame's "the funny man" (*Dream Days*) with Montgomery's "the Awkward Man" (Jasper Dale), for both characters are marked by an eccentricity that places

them in wonderland as honorary children. (Jasper Dale even marries a woman named Alice.) Another point of comparison is "the Artist" who appears in *The Golden Age* — a Grahame self-portrait — and the Story Girl's Bohemian father, Blair Stanley, who, like Grahame's Artist, possesses all the allure of having lived in Rome.

Toward the end of *The Golden Road*, in a chapter entitled "A Path to Arcady," Blair Stanley rambles in "fairyland" with his daughter and Beverley King: "Hand in hand we wandered through that enchanted place seeking the folk of elf-land, 'and heard their mystic voices calling, from fairy knoll and haunted hill'" (193). Here Montgomery slightly misquotes a verse, "The Fairy Minister," by the Scots poet Andrew Lang,³ that takes for its subject a Scottish minister from Aberfoyle. Legend has it that the Rev. Robert Kirk was taken captive by the fairies in 1692, a year after writing his treatise on supernatural beings, *The Secret Commonwealth*. With this literary allusion, Montgomery not only establishes a lineage of adults who countenance fairy lore, but she also takes a swipe at adults who destroy the wonderment of childhood, for Sara Stanley has been told there are "no such things as fairies" by a *minister* uncle (*Story Girl* 39). A similar situation occurs in *The Golden Age* where the governess pompously asserts that fairy tales "had their origin . . . in a mistaken anthropomorphism in the interpretation of nature" (74). Each evocation of fairyland privileges the child's reality. To Grahame's narrator, "there are higher things than truth" (40); to Sara Stanley, "there are two kinds of true things — true things that *are*, and true things that are *not*, but *might* be" (*Story Girl* 137).

From the child's point of view, then, adults come in two guises. Artistic adults like Blair Stanley remain "pilgrims on the golden road of youth" (*Golden Road* vii). Other adults can drift briefly into the child world, including those who seem to have grown up into fairy tale archetypes — Grahame's young heroes meet ladies they mistake for princesses; the King cousins forge tentative alliances with ogres like Mr. Campbell and witches like Peg Bowen. These adult characters, invariably from outside the family group, are set apart by their ability to play by the rules of the game, one in which the imagined is as potent as the real. In *The Golden Age*, the narrator's delight in the imagined treasures of a secret drawer is not obliterated by the dreary stuff the "drawer of disillusion" (102) contains; in *The Story Girl*, the mysterious contents of Rachel Ward's hope chest provide more thrills in anticipation than in realization. The magic itself is more important than any possible moral gleaned from its dissolution. At the other end of the adult scale, Olympians, like Montgomery's Uncle Roger King or Grahame's Uncle Thomas, stand fast in the "rooted conviction . . . that the reason of a child's existence was to serve as a butt for senseless adult jokes" (*Golden Age* 31). The "Land of Lost Delight" (*Golden Road* vii) is therefore vulnerable to the dangers of Olympian intrusions. This is best illustrated by the incident of "The Judgment Sunday" (*Story Girl*, ch. 19 and 20), in

which the children accept, after reading a newspaper report, that the end of the world is nigh: the Kings believe with the children in Grahame's books that "If a thing's in a book, it *must* be true" (*Golden Age* 75). Their adult relatives fail to recognize or curb their terror, just as Marilla cannot understand Anne's fear of a self-invented haunted wood, but the lesson is a different one: the King children learn to not trust "grown-ups," either those who write or edit newspapers or the surrounding aunts and uncles who, as Montgomery's blistered chronicler reflects, "considered our terror an exquisite jest" (*Story Girl* 150). The episode serves to enforce the barriers between child and adult realms, between "simple acceptance" and care-worn cynicism.

Furthermore, Montgomery appears to be redefining the scope of a good imagination. Anne Shirley terrifies herself with a set of conventional ghosts, including a white lady, a murdered child, a headless man, and skeletons. Similar spooks — the Family Ghost, the ghostly bell — are handled more lightly in *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road* and are not attacked as unchristian. In these books, Montgomery draws distinctions between a healthy imagination fueled by legends of old ghosts and a belief in fairies and witches and an unhealthy imagination fueled by the sort of "Last Trump" sensationalism pedaled by the Charlottetown *Daily Enterprise*. And it is not unimportant that the *Enterprise's* story of the imminent Judgment Day has its origin in "a certain noted sect in the United States" (*Story Girl* 144), a hint of anti-Americanism that appears also in the story that Peg Bowen's "madness" stems from her experiences in Boston (*Story Girl* 186).⁴ Montgomery was perhaps passing comment on the increasing proliferation of cheap, sensational literature — the "blood and thunders" — produced for children in the United States and also in Britain, thus advocating the pleasures of more wholesome escapes.

In turning their back on the United States and the real-life sensations its stories had to offer, *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road* instead promote a timeless idyll. But if it is one that is synonymous with childhood perception and one in which traditional superstition is a healthy pursuit, this idyll is also inextricably linked to the Prince Edward Island setting. The children in *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days* build their magic from English history and the collective English past of Lancelot and Sir Tristram, Roundheads and Cavaliers, Nelson and Grenville. As Jackie Wullschläger writes of Grahame's world and of other British invented wonderlands, "the ideal of a child-centred Arcadian idyll was deeply interwoven into the imaginative life of the country" (147). We can see this theme in Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906) and its sequel, *Rewards and Fairies* (1910): Dan and Una, the central child characters in this time-slip story, are guided by the fairy Puck through England's past, enabling Kipling to take as his theme "the continuing nature of England, conceived as ever present in its four dimensions of space and time" (Townsend 107). These books were favour-

ites with Montgomery, who was still singing *Puck of Pook's Hill's* praises in 1936 (Unpublished journal entry, 18 Jan. 1936).

The surname King may acknowledge a British heritage, but when the King cousins substitute "Prince Edward Island" and not "Canada" or "the Empire" for "England" when adapting Nelson's "England expects that every man will do his duty" for the motto of their magazine (*Golden Road* 4), Montgomery signals where the patriotism of the children and of these novels lies. Prince Edward Island's history was seldom dramatic or militaristic, but the *Story Girl* shares the English child's (or Puck's) interest in the past, in myth and legend; in her tales, she substitutes Island folklore and oral family history for the received tales of knights and soldiers and naval commanders. The King cousins, however, are no poorer creatively for their daydreams being homegrown. Although the adults are uninterested in their little dramas, family fascinates the cousins and their friends. They inhabit a world that is out of the ordinary and out of time, because they understand, appreciate, and are energized by the force of the history of their own family and province — they are Kings of the Island.

It is this Island celebration that is witness to the clearest break with the *Anne of Green Gables* model. In *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road*, Montgomery found a place for her own family stories — many of them told to her by her Aunt Mary Lawson, to whom *The Golden Road* is dedicated — that was wanting in her tale of a rootless orphan from Nova Scotia. By fusing local legends and family folklore with a child's sense of wonder and play, Montgomery created her own Canadian world of fancy, which could compete for charm with the British wonderlands she so enjoyed. In so doing, she seemed to find a new niche as a novelist. The "fairylend" she conjured up in *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road*, with its emphasis on the magic of memory and on the preciousness of oral history, appears as a stepping stone to her later fiction by enabling her to write about her Canadian world with fewer concessions to American tastes. Her next diversion from Avonlea was, after all, the *Emily* trilogy, the story of an author who eventually defies pressure from a New York literato and elects to stay in Canada.

The Story Girl was to be Montgomery's Island swansong: it was the last book she wrote in Cavendish. In it she tried to distill the essence of Prince Edward Island's charms, not only those of setting which readers of *Anne of Green Gables* were familiar with, but also the delights and imaginative scope of a shared past. It was also her farewell to youth, the last book she wrote about childhood before she was married with children of her own. In retrospect, the publication of *The Golden Road* was also momentous, since all subsequent Montgomery books would bear the imprint of the First World War. Even in the shelter of Rainbow Valley, Anne Blythe's children cannot escape the future conflict's shadow; her boys are the Empire's soldiers in embryo, and Island history walks hand-in-hand with national destiny. For

these reasons, the carefree, changeless, and collective childhood in *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road* remains, in many respects, unique in Montgomery's body of work.

Conclusion: The Island Arcadia

L.M. Montgomery was a great admirer of British children's books: her favourites included stories by Scottish authors such as Kenneth Grahame and J.M. Barrie — the infant Chester Macdonald was nicknamed "Peter Pan" by his mother (Unpublished letter to MacMillan, 16 Mar. 1913) — as well as George MacDonald, whose *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871) she read a dozen times or more (Unpublished letter to MacMillan, 31 Mar. 1930). She read works by a diverse range of British authors to her own children, from the animal stories of Beatrix Potter to the public school stories of Talbot Baines Reed. Her fictional children inherit this love: Dan King reads G.A. Henty's adventure stories; Pat Gardiner reads *The Wind in the Willows*; Jane Stuart knows her *Alice*; both Anne and Emily read *At the Back of the North Wind*, and Macdonald's personification of the north wind is an obvious forerunner for Emily Byrd Starr's "Wind Woman." As this suggests, British children's books inspired L.M. Montgomery. To take E. Nesbit as just one example, *Our Magazine* in *The Golden Road* — although partly a nod to the *Pickwick Portfolio* in Alcott's *Little Women* — is closer in format, style, and humour to the Bastables' *Lewisham Recorder* in Nesbit's *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899). Both the Bastables and Marigold Lesley do not realize that one of their playmates is a real princess and cousin of Queen Victoria; the "Society of the Wouldbegoods" in Nesbit's *The Wouldbegoods* (1901) predates the Merediths' "Good Conduct Club" in Montgomery's *Rainbow Valley* (1919). Like Montgomery, Nesbit owed a literary debt to Kenneth Grahame's pioneering books; like Nesbit, Montgomery tempered her books "about children" with a comic edge that Grahame's philosophical stories lack.⁵

But on more than one occasion Montgomery lets slip that Canada, being "a new land" (*Pat of Silver Bush* 132), might lack the proper credentials for fairyland that the old world abounded in. (In Susanna Moodie's famous words, Canada was "too new for ghosts" [251].) For Montgomery, this was not only a state of mind but also a literary proscription: she remarked to George MacMillan, with reference to her inability to create books like Flora Klickmann's *Flower Patch* series, "I couldn't have the background here that is ready to the British writer's hand. One has to have ghosts and old gods" (Unpublished letter, 18 Feb. 1923). In this respect, it is pertinent that Sara Stanley leaves Canada for Europe at the close of *The Golden Road*: only in Europe, we are told, can her imaginative potential be fulfilled. Nevertheless, in reviewing *The Golden Road* on 26 February 1914, *The Scotsman* commented that, although the "American origin of the book is unmistak-

able . . . young people of school age in Charlottetown or Carlisle are pretty much the same in temperament, disposition, inclination, and desire as the young people of Birmingham or Edinburgh" ("Scrapbook of Reviews"). By combining reality and make-believe in the *Story Girl* books, Montgomery created a universal childhood, certainly, but one that was visibly closer to the ideals of an Empire childhood than the American childhood of *Anne of Green Gables*.

Anne of Green Gables may be L.M. Montgomery's finest book and it has certainly had the greatest cultural impact, yet we do her a disservice if we view this book as the model for all her subsequent work. Despite pressure from her publisher and the public, Montgomery did not write more books that were just the same as her first. At several stages in her literary career, Montgomery revealed that she held ambitions beyond writing for young people and that she longed to do "something so much more worthwhile" than "another Anne book" (*Selected Journals* II [27 Sept. 1913] 133). It seems only logical that to fulfil her dreams of literary accomplishment, Montgomery would diversify from the "Anne" type of book and the "Anne" type of heroine. As it would happen, of course, the outbreak of war in 1914 gave new purpose and vigour to the *Anne* series, and Montgomery discovered it was the perfect vehicle for taking the spirit of Canada's war effort to a mass audience.

Yet although Montgomery increasingly resented Anne's grip on the popular imagination, she derived pride from the fact that her depiction of Prince Edward Island was singled out for critical praise. As Janis Dawson writes, "To many critics and general readers, the essence of Anne's Canadianness lies in Montgomery's celebration of the physical landscape of Prince Edward Island" (34). But once *Anne of Green Gables* had proved that there was "scope for imagination" — and scope for book sales — in "a simple P.E.I. farming settlement" (*Selected Journals* I [15 Oct. 1908] 339), Montgomery's work shows an escalating mandate to describe the *history* and *culture*, as well as the natural beauty, of her native province. Calvin Trillin has made the canny remark that Montgomery's "books are so imbued with the look and feel of Prince Edward Island that the province itself practically qualifies as one of her characters" (217). Before 1911, Montgomery admittedly had little experience of life elsewhere, but the *Story Girl* books demonstrate that there was more than one method for turning this life into fiction.

Four years before the outbreak of the First World War, L.M. Montgomery prophesied that only under "some great crisis of storm and stress" that "fused her varying elements into a harmonious whole" would Canada produce a literary "expression of our national life as a whole" (qtd. in *Selected Journals* II [27 Aug. 1919] 339-40). The changes that Montgomery made to her literary output after *Anne of Green Gables* and again after the war mean that for all that they are orphan heroines, Emily Byrd Starr more closely

resembles the children of the *Story Girl* books than she does Anne Shirley. Bound to and inspired by the customs of the clan and the province she was born into, Emily also stakes the greater claim as a Canadian heroine. Canadian national identity for Montgomery was rooted in the Canadian past, a past that was preserved in family lore and tradition, and a past that she urged her audiences at literary events in the 1920s and 1930s to preserve. Increasingly in her fiction, Montgomery also preserved the past as a way of articulating Canada and as a way of adding “glamour” and “magic” to the rural farming world. *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road* are not “British” children’s books any more than *Anne of Green Gables* is an “American” one, but British books, with their philosophy of a dreamy, detached childhood and the space they allowed for imaginative journeys into the past, seem curiously enough to have had a critical impact on the way that Montgomery would come to write about Canada.

Notes

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the L.M. Montgomery and Popular Culture International Conference, University of Prince Edward Island (2000).

- 1 The publishers to whom Montgomery claims to have submitted the manuscript of *Anne of Green Gables* are Bobbs-Merrill of Indianapolis; Macmillan Co. of New York; Lothrop, Lee and Shepard of Boston; Henry Holt Co. of New York; and finally L.C. Page & Co. of Boston (*Selected Journals* I [16 Aug. 1907] 330-31).
- 2 Sara Stanley’s mother is dead and her father is travelling in Europe; Felix and Beverley’s mother is dead and their father is absent on business; Sara Ray has no father; Peter’s father has deserted his mother.
- 3 Lang’s original line is “And heard your mystic voices calling / From fairy knowe and haunted hill,” *knowe* being Scots dialect for *knoll*.
- 4 In *Anne of the Island*, Rachel Lynde reads the murder trial reports in a Boston newspaper for excitement, although she advises Anne Shirley that “The States must be an awful place” (55).
- 5 L.M. Montgomery, like E. Nesbit and more recently J.K. Rowling, published under her initials and not her first name and could thus be mistaken for a male author. Like Montgomery’s *Story Girl* books, Nesbit’s trilogy about the Bastable children has a male narrator, Oswald Bastable, who reckons in *The Wouldbegoods* that Grahame’s *The Golden Age* is “A1, except where it gets mixed with grown-up nonsense” (85).

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