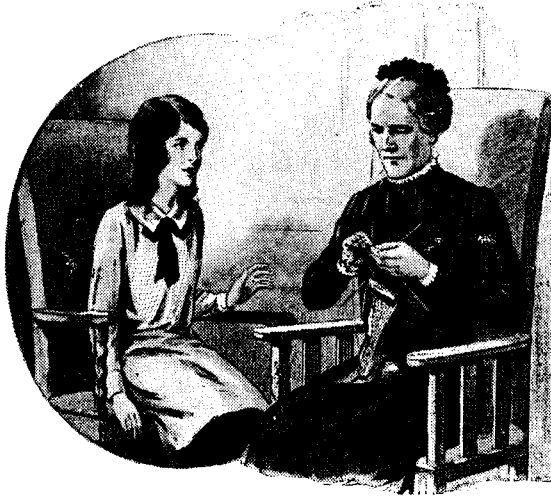


## *Editorial: Tradition and the Individual Talent*

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Go to Shrewsbury? Had she heard aright? "Oh, Aunt Elizabeth!" she said.

At a recent Canadian children's literature symposium in Ottawa, the audience groaned loudly when it was announced that there were two sessions on L.M. Montgomery's fiction (fully six symposium papers out of a total of fifteen given). Later, the groaners explained to me that they wondered when in the world academics were going to start paying attention to all of the other great Canadian books out there for children and young adults. They're tired of Anne of Green Gables with her pert pigtailed and excess of personality. Tired of her being the only Canadian child character anyone knows. To them, Montgomery is old news: the influence of her Presbyterianism — done; her conception of female adolescence — done; her popularity in Poland, Japan ... wherever — done, done, done; her feminism — done to death. What else could there be to say? they wonder impatiently. Well, we sometimes wonder the same. But, then we attend conferences and hear about the erotic in Montgomery's fiction — yes, the erotic; we read the latest editions of Montgomery's autobiographical writings and wonder where we ever got the idea that she had a sunny disposition; and, of course, we read the papers that come into our office about Montgomery's works. All of these remind us that we're not done with Maud.

Like no other children's writer in Canada, Montgomery has inspired

a critical tradition. It is difficult to say what it is about her work that has brought so many scholars to it, but surely two simple reasons are its publication dates and its continued popularity: it has been around long enough to have acquired a sizeable number of critical articles, including debates — always a lure for critics — and it is still read. Mary Rubio will tell you, however, that the critical tradition hasn't come easily. It has only been since the rise of feminist and cultural criticism that Montgomery has received serious critical attention. Further, contrary to general impression, the Montgomery tradition is not a conservative one. As the articles in this issue of *CCL* attest, it has moved beyond the pious exegetics of New Criticism. Lefebvre's piece, "Walter's Closet," looks at the unsaid in *Rilla of Ingleside* and carefully suggests that the characterization of one of Montgomery's ideal males reflects cultural tropes that associate him with homosexuality. Lawson's piece enters into the ongoing discussion of Montgomery's conceptions of female agency by using the psychoanalytic theory of Abraham and Torok to analyse traumatic inheritance in the Emily books. And so the tradition continues ... and flourishes.

Of course, what Montgomery herself would make of such work as Lefebvre's and Lawson's is only a matter of humorous speculation. Some would have her rolling in her proverbial grave or shaking her melancholic husband off his couch of gloom to read him the outrageous things the critics say; others say she would be thrilled at the serious attention; others still remark that her response is neither here nor there: the work should stand or fall on its own. This last remark forms the foundation for one part of a debate that we feature in the second section of this issue: what should be the relationship between critic and author? Are critics responsible to authors for what they print, especially if it is unflattering? Should critics be more sensitive to the exigencies of a writer's life — from sales to self-esteem? Should writers strive to understand better what critics are trained to do? What writers who are alive and well make of some of the articles *CCL* publishes about their work is seldom clear to us. Last summer, however, we published an interview with Welwyn Wilton Katz that made it abundantly clear what she thought of some parts of the critical tradition accruing about her work. Herein we print the responses to that interview. And so the tradition continues ... and flourishes.

*Marie Davis*