



## **The “Murray Look”: Trauma as Family Legacy in L.M. Montgomery’s *Emily of New Moon* Trilogy**

—Lindsey McMaster

When taken in by the Murray family after her father’s death, the title heroine of L.M. Montgomery’s *Emily of New Moon* discovers that she is heir to an impressive family lineage in which the Murrays take great pride; but the proud ancestors, now at rest in the New Moon cemetery, were no models of peace and harmony when living. Their disputes pitted husband against wife and father against daughter in battles of formative significance to the living characters. When the authoritarian Aunt Elizabeth tries to cut Emily’s hair, Emily’s defiance is heightened, almost supernaturally, by her use of the intimidating “Murray look,” an inheritance from her grandfather (Elizabeth’s father), Archibald Murray. Cowed by Emily’s uncanny channelling of this patriarchal authority, Elizabeth gives up on the haircut, but she takes her revenge later on by locking Emily in the terrifying spare room, home to Archibald’s

menacing portrait.

To understand the family politics at work here, readers must be alert to the personal and family histories L.M. Montgomery weaves into her *Emily of New Moon* trilogy.<sup>1</sup> The present-day narrative of Emily’s coming of age is subject to carefully worked-out historical influences; when forced to surrender in the face of the “Murray look,” Aunt Elizabeth is reliving past battles with her father. This study explores the bitter conflict, trauma, and resentment stemming from those past battles, which provide the psychological depth and Gothic undertone of the three *Emily* novels. Emily must grow to maturity and find her writer’s voice in the context of generations-long gendered conflict that has blighted the lives of the men and women in this family and in the extended community. “The struggle to manage family and art,” as Judith Miller has shown, is a central source of tension in the

*Emily* novels (302), and this article explores the history of trauma in Emily's family that profoundly troubles her development as a woman and artist, but that ultimately helps determine her eventual triumph as both writer and family member. Central to Montgomery's carefully layered exploration of familial influence and inheritance is the figure of Aunt Elizabeth, "boss at New Moon" (*ENM* 31), whose troubling abuse of authority has its own underside of rage, grief, and trauma that makes her development in *Emily of New Moon* a crucial counterpoint to Emily's own journey as heroine and artist. While Emily's relationship with Aunt Elizabeth provides the central conflict in the first novel, in the two subsequent books, Montgomery develops similarly dark familial histories for the men whose romantic interest in Emily may be equally dangerous to her artistry.

In her article entitled "Adolescence and the Trauma of Maternal Inheritance in L.M. Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon*," Kate Lawson excavates the thematically rich back story that informs the first novel's account of adolescent female development. She focuses primarily upon the female side of the family: Emily's mother, Juliet, is infamous among the Murray clan for eloping, an act that severed her from the family permanently and that results in Emily being looked upon with suspicion by the Murrays, who fear that



she will similarly challenge the restrictions placed upon self-determined forms of female sexuality. In addition, Lawson explores Emily's "troubling legacy of angry and rebellious female ancestors" (23), including Aunt Elizabeth and two of Emily's key female forbears, Mary Shipley and Elizabeth Burnley, whose marital disputes are the stuff of Murray legend. I intend to further the detective work begun by Lawson by looking more closely at the male side of Emily's family legacy, for it is here that we find the source of the female rage that Lawson documents. Aunt Elizabeth is undoubtedly harbouring deep rage and resentment, which she visits upon Emily in various ways, but I think her character deserves more attention—perhaps more sympathetic attention—than it has received in literary criticism so far: there is evidence that Aunt Elizabeth, too, is dealing with the troubling family legacies that inform Emily's growth, and that her often harsh regime at *New Moon* represents the reign of a ruler whose battle for power was long and painful and has been secured (for now) with sacrifices that continue to haunt.

Scholars have suggested of *Anne of Green Gables* that a matriarchal utopia can be found among the empowered female role-models (either spinsters or married women with submissive husbands) who mentor the child heroine.<sup>2</sup> The same has not been suggested of the *Emily* trilogy

because the prominent widows and spinsters who populate the novels display a malevolence not shared by their Avonlea counterparts. As Lorna Drew puts it, “Montgomery’s Emily trilogy is full of women whose sheer bloody-mindedness speaks their unhappiness” (26). The powerful and oppressive authoritarian, Aunt Elizabeth, has quite convincingly been dubbed a “female-clad patriarch.”<sup>3</sup> Linking Aunt Elizabeth with “the authoritarian mannish types who mimic the male prerogative to rule,” Mary Rubio suggests that Elizabeth “is made in the image of her formidable father, Archibald Murray” (“Subverting” 24). There is a vicious strength to Elizabeth’s hold on power at New Moon—a kind of strength we tend to reach for male adjectives to describe—but is such strength necessarily masculine in nature? Lawson qualifies the argument for Elizabeth as “patriarchal,” reminding us that, “In realist terms, Aunt Elizabeth is a woman who is the head of New Moon and who seeks to enforce a matriarchal structure of domesticity and ‘family values.’ However much gender is a construct in the novel, it is clear that Elizabeth herself believes that the femininity she exemplifies is also enjoined upon Emily” (“Adolescence” 24). Aunt Elizabeth instructs Emily to be “grateful and obedient” and to conduct herself “with becoming prudence and modesty”; though Emily is to be “educated properly,” she

is not to receive higher education or to aspire to support herself independently (*ENM* 68). Elizabeth’s comment—“I do not believe in girls going out into the world. . . . The Murray women have never had to work out for a living” (*ENM* 314)—stands in contrast with Marilla Cuthbert’s more progressive belief, in *Anne of Green Gables*, that a girl should be “fitted to earn her own living whether she ever has to or not” (274).<sup>4</sup> Emily must battle Aunt Elizabeth’s attitudes to secure her own future, but one wonders how Elizabeth—clearly a strong-minded, assertive, and competent woman—first internalized these repressive dictates herself. Evidence points to her father, Archibald Murray, author of the “Murray look.”

In *Emily Climbs*, when Emily threatens to drop out of school because of a conflict with Aunt Ruth, Cousin Jimmy suggests that Emily’s grandmothers (referring to her Murray ancestors such as Mary Shipley and Elizabeth Burnley, as well as Archibald’s wives) would never “have given up a chance for an education so easily” (149). When Emily says they didn’t have to put up with Aunt Ruth, his reply is ready: “‘They had to put up with your grandfathers.’ Cousin Jimmy appeared to think that this was conclusive—as anyone who had known Archibald and Hugh Murray might have very well thought” (*EC* 150). Elizabeth, it would seem, has become complicit with Emily’s

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grandfathers, but Jimmy has earlier informed Emily that “Aunt Elizabeth used to fight with her father something scandalus [sic] when he was alive though no outsider knew of it because of the Murray pride” (*ENM* 105). Jimmy’s words suggest that Elizabeth, though firmly in authority now, was once herself the female rebel at New Moon, but that this history of gendered family conflict has been deliberately hidden away. There is a culture in this family of bitter conflict carefully concealed—of trauma and its repression.

Archibald’s patriarchal influence and Elizabeth’s right to resent it are also subtly suggested by matters of inheritance. As Anne Williams points out, the will is “a written text that conveys the ‘will’ of the writer from beyond the grave” (67). This is precisely the mode in which Archibald’s presence is felt in the novels: in *Emily Climbs*, Emily makes light of the pressure placed upon her to marry Andrew Murray, despite Uncle Wallace’s earlier reminder to Aunt Elizabeth that “You and Laura will not live forever . . . and when you are gone New Moon goes to Oliver’s Andrew” (*ENM* 314). Elizabeth may be “boss” at New Moon,

but she lacks the patriarchal privilege of true ownership of the home; she cannot will New Moon to Emily, and must stand by in *Emily’s Quest* as Andrew puts on “proprietary airs” and suggests cutting down the Lombardies:

“If you had married Andrew New Moon would have been yours,” said Aunt Elizabeth bitterly, when she found Emily crying over what [Andrew and Uncle Oliver] had said.

“But the changes would have come just the same,” said Emily. “Andrew wouldn’t have listened to me. He believes that the husband is the head of the wife.” (*EQ* 150)

Montgomery herself knew the heartbreak of losing her home under similar circumstances: “Maud well knew that when her grandmother died the house in which they lived, and in which she had been raised, would go to her Uncle John Macneill, who lived on the adjacent property. She would then be dispossessed of the only home she had ever known” (Rubio and Waterston x). I think it is telling that Montgomery assigns to Aunt Elizabeth the

bitterness she must have felt toward the patriarchal custom that meant the loss of a beloved home. Though Aunt Elizabeth seems in the novels to be utterly in control of New Moon and its many customs, true ownership is not hers, and she clearly feels the sting of her resulting subordination to young Andrew, whose own patriarchal attitudes are made explicit.

When Emily first comes to New Moon, she, too, has just lost a home, and her arrival coincides with the unwelcome edict that she will be sharing a bed with the equally reluctant Aunt Elizabeth. The loss of her home and her own much beloved father coupled with the cold indifference of Elizabeth soon have Emily in tears, but her appeals to Elizabeth for sympathy—“Didn’t you feel awfully lonely when *your* father died?”—have an unexpected effect:

Elizabeth Murray involuntarily remembered the ashamed, smothered feeling of relief when old Archibald Murray had died—the handsome, intolerant, autocratic old man who had ruled his family with a rod of iron all his life and had made existence at New Moon miserable with the petulant tyranny of the five years of invalidism that had closed his career. The surviving Murrays had behaved impeccably, and wept decorously, and printed a long and

flattering obituary. But had one genuine feeling of regret followed Archibald Murray to his tomb? Elizabeth did not like the memory and was angry with Emily for evoking it. (*ENM* 67)

Though benevolent and nurturing but weakened men (such as Emily’s father, Cousin Jimmy, and Mr. Carpenter) are more immediately present in the novel, we find here that the patriarch in the previous generation was of quite a different order—intolerant, autocratic, tyrannical. The exchange between Emily and Elizabeth brings this contrast to the fore and begins to explain where Elizabeth’s authoritarian impulses and will to rule come from. Rubio describes Aunt Elizabeth as a “chip off the block of old Archibald Murray” (“Subverting” 24), but I think it is important to note that though she *now* resembles Archibald in wielding power and authority at New Moon, she herself was once subject to that angry male autocrat. To say she is a “female-clad patriarch” may not be inaccurate, but it nevertheless obscures the complexity of Elizabeth’s own abuse at the hands of patriarchy. As with Emily Brontë’s Heathcliff, the abused child who becomes the child-abuser, Aunt Elizabeth’s present-day treatment of Emily, particularly her fights with Emily, are intimately linked to past battles and the trauma incurred by them. Montgomery makes

this clear, I think, to remind us that though Aunt Elizabeth may be the “autocrat unchallenged” (*ENM* 325) now, she was once the child victim, and this gives her will to power a very different significance and subtext.

Drew reads the *Emily* novels in the context of the Gothic tradition by comparing them to Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.<sup>5</sup> She provides detailed readings of the male characters in the *Emily* novels who are “coded feminine” (25), but she also mentions briefly the exceptions to this rule: “Those who are not [coded feminine] are brutes, as attested to by the character of Dr. Burnley (before the exoneration of his wife) and the awful Murray patriarchs whose portraits terrify the heroine” (25). Archibald, whose portraits hang in both the parlour and the spare room, thus lends New Moon its own Gothic history of menacing patriarchs, a past that may seem remote to Emily but that remains more recent for Elizabeth. Archibald—who, as mentioned above, “ruled his family with a rod of iron”—now returns in uncanny ways, linking his character to the supernatural moments in the text that also evidence its Gothic undertones. As it appears on Emily’s face, this “Murray look” is described as “an uprush as from unknown depths of some irresistible surge of energy” that makes Emily appear “transformed or possessed” (*ENM* 117).

Later, when Emily is locked in the spare room, it is Archibald’s portrait that provides the climax to her terror: “In that gleam of light his face seemed veritably to leap out of the gloom at Emily with its grim frown strangely exaggerated” (122). For Elizabeth, confronting the “Murray look” is even more ghastly: “to see the Murray look suddenly superimposed like a mask over [Emily’s] alien features, was such a shock to her nerves that she could not stand up against it. A ghost from the grave could not have cowed her more speedily” (*ENM* 159). Lawson notes that “all three novels are punctuated by uncanny events, by excursions into a Gothic mode that disrupt the girl’s smooth transition from rebellious child to compliant adult” (“Alien” 156). Indeed, the “Murray look” arises precisely in moments of rebellion, initially as a characteristic of oppressive Aunt Elizabeth herself, who uses it to quell Emily’s rebellion against the apron with sleeves she forces on Emily the first day of school. Upon receiving the look, Emily “buttoned her rebellious feeling tightly up in her soul” and, when Aunt Laura tries to comfort her by telling her the apron was once worn by her mother, Juliet, Emily retorts, “Then I don’t wonder she ran away with Father when she grew up” (*ENM* 86). Elizabeth’s use of the patriarchally inherited instrument of authority, the “Murray look,” brings back to life precisely the old battles



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against that authority, including Juliet’s elopement, which ruptured the family and resulted in Emily’s birth. Moments like this—where Elizabeth wields too heavy-handed an authority over Emily only to be reminded of Archibald, whose own authority “had made existence at New Moon miserable” for her<sup>6</sup>—occur repeatedly in the relationship between Emily and Elizabeth and suggest, though subtly and through suggestive techniques of Gothic fiction like the ghostly “Murray look,” a cycle of trauma and even abuse repeating itself within the Murray family. When Elizabeth treads in her father’s autocratic footsteps most fully and becomes the “female-clad patriarch,” she is forced to return to her own traumatic memory of being Archibald’s daughter. Montgomery confirms this by having Elizabeth, used to wielding the “Murray look” herself, suddenly confront it in Emily instead, forcibly returning Elizabeth to her own childhood experience of terror. Feminist critics of the Gothic tradition have found psychoanalytic theories of

trauma to be especially suited to the explication of this kind of narrative technique of coded repetition, which is shared by texts of the “female Gothic.”<sup>7</sup>

In *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, Anne Williams explains that “‘Female Gothic’ creates a Looking-Glass World where ancient assumptions about the ‘male’ and ‘female’ . . . are suspended or so transformed as to reveal an entirely different world, exposing the perils lurking in the father’s corridors of power” (107). This troubling mode of representation that renders the categories of “male” and “female” disturbingly unfamiliar and potentially perilous is certainly evident in the *Emily* novels, where nurturing men and authoritarian women upset our assumptions about the usual allocation of gendered characteristics. Critics who read Gothic narratives as expressions of trauma in turn engage in a symptomatic reading of both character and narrative technique. For Michelle A. Massé, “The originating trauma is the prohibition of female autonomy in the Gothic, in the families

that people it, and in the society that reads it" (681). Thus, feminist understandings of trauma include in the category of "trauma" not only isolated "near-death" events, but also ongoing situations such as those involving child abuse or domestic abuse.

Key to the experience of trauma is an inability to integrate the traumatic event into consciousness in a way that would render it accessible and acceptable to the self: according to James Berger, "Freud held that an overpowering event, unacceptable to consciousness, can be forgotten and yet return in the form of somatic symptoms or compulsive, repetitive behaviors" (570). This begins to describe Aunt Elizabeth, brought up under the "tyranny" of Archibald Murray, now herself the tyrant, but with each tyrannical act subject to clearly disturbing, arguably traumatic psychological reactions, triggered by the uncanny reappearance of her own past abuser on the very face of her victim. When Emily first assumes the "Murray look" and forbids Elizabeth to cut her hair, Elizabeth's reaction is dramatic:

An amazing thing happened to Aunt Elizabeth. She turned pale—she laid the scissors down—she looked aghast for one moment at the transformed or possessed child before her—and then for the first time in her life Elizabeth

Murray turned tail and fled—literally fled—to the kitchen. . . . "I saw—Father—looking from her face," gasped Elizabeth, trembling. "And she said, 'Let me hear no more of this'—just as *he* always said it—his very words." (*ENM* 117)

Laurie Vickroy writes about trauma narratives and explains the kind of symptoms we witness in Aunt Elizabeth: "Fundamental to the traumatic experience is that the past lingers unresolved. . . . Traumatic 'memories' appear in the repetitive, intrusive forms of visualizations of the trauma scene, nightmares, or associated affects" (12). Read this way, Aunt Elizabeth's "patriarchal" attributes take on quite a new meaning, as the traumatic repetition of her own past abuse. And the "Murray look"—as one of Emily's supernatural inheritances—becomes a more politically loaded narrative technique, for it allows the child victim to become a reflection, showing the victimizer what she has become. That Archibald's influence continues to contaminate the present-day family relations in moments of conflict and cruelty also suggests a subtle critique by Montgomery of patriarchal authority in the family, for it is the patriarchal influence that haunts and poisons the family relationships and that needs to be extinguished for Emily and Elizabeth to reconcile.

With the "Murray look," Montgomery employs



the Gothic supernatural in order to explore sensitive and controversial subjects—psychological trauma stemming from past abuse—in carefully veiled ways that, perhaps necessarily, protect the intended child readership but that also express the tension characteristic of trauma narratives concerning what is known and what is suppressed. As Cathy Caruth explains,

Trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and language. (4)

Sensitive to this coexistence of the known and the unknown, Montgomery's narrative suggests much but also leaves much unsaid, and the displacement of the most bitter Murray-family conflict into a back story about previous generations reveals this kind of ambivalent engagement with a truth "in its delayed appearance and belated address." Montgomery's narrator informs us that when Elizabeth locks Emily in the spare room, "She did not realize and would not have for a

moment believed that she was really wreaking her own smothered resentment with Emily for her defeat and fright on the day of the threatened hair-cutting" (*ENM* 120). That Elizabeth works according to unconscious motivations stemming from the rage and resentment ignited in past battles (that themselves return her to the conflict with her father) is utterly in character with a traumatized subject who re-enacts the experience of trauma unknowingly and even against her own will. Elizabeth's strong reactions to the "Murray look" nevertheless show her vulnerable to reminders of her experience under Archibald; indeed, although Elizabeth lacks the awareness to fully recognize the nature and source of her rage, she does show the ability to register some degree of horror at the results of her own outbursts.

Montgomery develops Elizabeth's complex engagement with the power struggles of the past not only through her battles with Emily, but also through her history with Cousin Jimmy. "Elizabeth's boss at New Moon" (*ENM* 31) because he is the only resident male, Jimmy has remained in a child-like state ever since he fell down a well and sustained a serious head injury at her hands. Emily hears from a schoolmate that, as word has it, Elizabeth "nearly killed your Cousin Jimmy in one of her rages" (*ENM* 94). Like Emily, Jimmy has been a victim of Elizabeth's misdirected anger.

Through Jimmy, we learn, however, that Elizabeth's will to dominate is complemented by moments of intense guilt about the ruin her actions have brought about. Elizabeth reflects on Jimmy and Emily's shared interest in poetry and is reminded that "his accident—Elizabeth always went a little sick in soul when she remembered it—had made him more or less a child for life" (*ENM* 321). As Jimmy describes it,

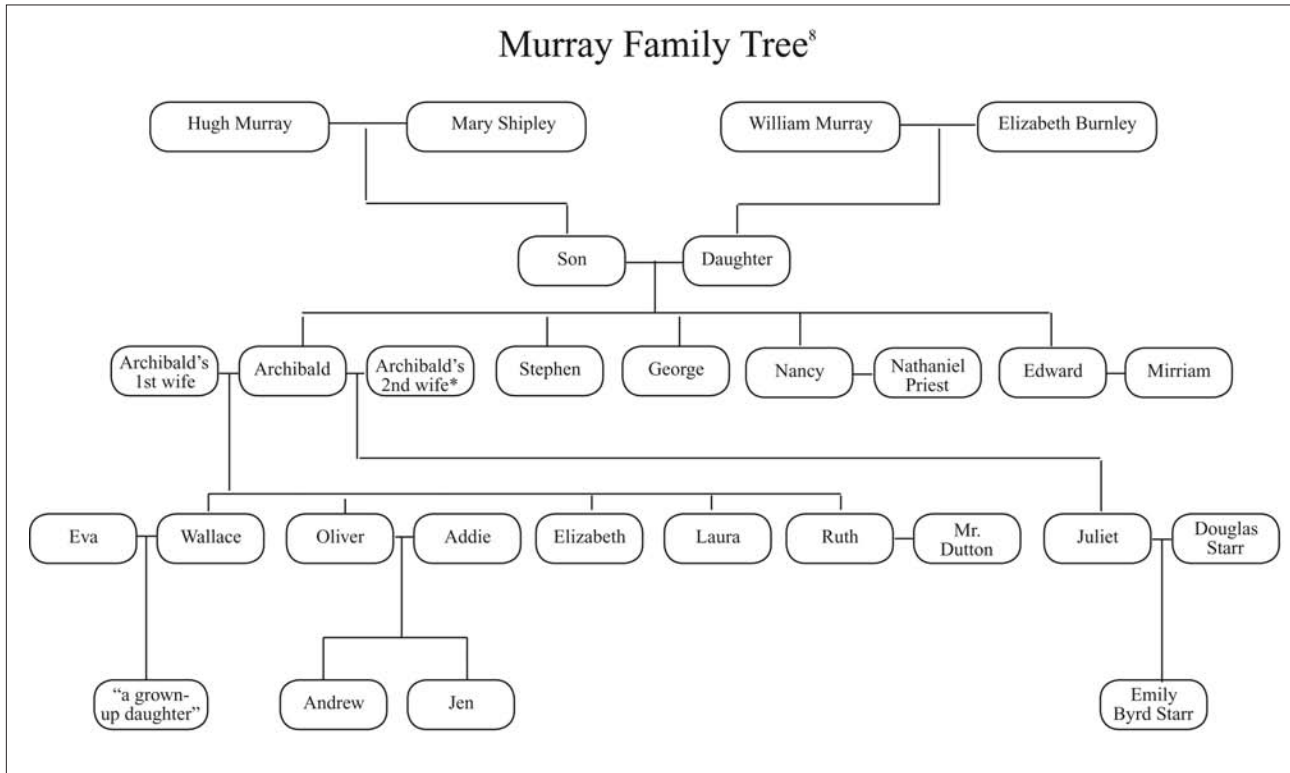
"I made Elizabeth mad—forget what I said—'twasn't *hard* to make her mad, you understand—and she made to give me a bang on the head. I saw it coming—and stepped back to get out of the way—and down I went, head first. . . . I was took up for dead—my head all cut up. Poor Elizabeth was—" Cousin Jimmy shook his head, as if to intimate that it was impossible to describe how or what poor Elizabeth was. ". . . Folks say I've never been quite right since—but they only say that because I'm a poet, and because nothing ever worries me." (*ENM* 76–77)

The line between intentional and accidental injury is carefully muddied here, for in her anger, Elizabeth did mean to do violence to Jimmy's head, even if the fall down the well and its permanent result were unintended. In Great-

Aunt Nancy's point of view, it was a crime not sufficiently punished: "Jimmy Murray was a very clever boy. Elizabeth Murray killed his intellect in her temper—and nothing was done to her. If she had killed his body she would have been a murderess. The other was worse, if you ask me" (*ENM* 267). Jimmy himself does not seem to hold a grudge when he initially tells Emily of the event and of his being a poet, but in *Emily's Quest* he is pictured weeping over the task of uprooting saplings: "I caught Cousin Jimmy in tears over the brutal necessity. 'I sometimes think,' he whispered, 'that it's wrong to prevent anything from growing. I never grew up—not in my head'" (104). Though Jimmy's childlike state affords him a special place in the novel as Emily's friend and fellow poet, his history is a reminder that Elizabeth's dominance has come at a heavy price; permanent wounds have been inflicted for which there is no remedy, and it appears that Elizabeth, too, has suffered deep shame and remorse for what her anger has wrought. She thus experiences both the rage of the mistreated victim and the intense remorse of the perpetrator, yet remains unable to recognize these as part of a pattern in the Murray-family dynamics.

The sense of a Gothic patriarchy whose influence extends eerily beyond the grave is confirmed by the stories Jimmy tells Emily on their strolls through the New Moon cemetery. The

## Murray Family Tree<sup>8</sup>



Murrays' history goes back to the late-eighteenth century, when Hugh and Mary Murray settled on Prince Edward Island. Though their original destination was Québec, Mary had been so seasick on the voyage that when the captain allowed her to alight briefly on Prince Edward Island, she refused to leave. "Here I stay" were her words once she felt the comfort of dry land under her

feet, and she wouldn't budge, even though her husband "coaxed and stormed and raged and argued—and even cried" (*ENM* 81); they stayed, but her defiance "rankled" with her husband, who finally took his revenge by having her words "Here I stay" engraved on her tombstone. Emily shivers at "that grim old ancestor with his undying grudge against his nearest and dearest" (*ENM* 82). The

men and women of the Murray family have been locked in bitter dispute from the moment they set foot in Canada, and there is evidence that a warfare mentality is part of the legacy inherited by later generations. Allan Burnley, a “forty-second cousin” of the family (*ENM* 84), is renowned for his hatred of women, a result of his wife apparently leaving him for another man. Resolving the misunderstanding that led to Allan Burnley’s bitter condemnation of his wife and of all women forms one of the major plot lines of the first book; it is a feat accomplished by Emily via supernatural means, and it suggests the importance in these books of putting to rest some of these festering disputes. In solving this mystery, Emily also teaches the family not to jump so quickly to judgment of its members: as Aunt Laura says, “We blame ourselves now for our lack of faith. . . . For twelve years we have wronged the dead” (*ENM* 342–43). Through her other-worldly ability, Emily sets to rights what has gone wrong in previous generations, mending the community as part of her entrance into it, and thus employing the text’s Gothic supernatural elements to newly constructive ends—a fitting task for the woman writer. Significantly, Cousin Jimmy points out that the New Moon graveyard is “nearly full,” with room left only for Elizabeth, Laura, and him—“None for you, Emily” (*ENM* 83)—suggesting that, with his generation, the Murray progenitors

and their formative cycle of the Murray legacy is coming to a close. It is a cycle Emily will not continue.

But she doesn’t reach this point until she has experienced first-hand the Murray legacy of domination and subordination through Aunt Elizabeth’s heavy-handed approach to guardianship. Indeed, Emily’s relationship with Elizabeth lends extraordinary power to the “deep and furious ambivalence” Lawson identifies in the women of *New Moon* (“Adolescence” 30); where Emily clings lovingly to the memory of her wonderfully nurturing departed father, Elizabeth feels ashamed at her own relief that her father is dead and gone. This duality of gentleness and rage, especially as a reaction to patriarchal influence, suggests a reading of Elizabeth as a Bertha figure to Emily’s Jane, along the lines of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic*: “For it is, after all, through the violence of the double that the female author enacts her own raging desire to escape male houses and male texts, while at the same time it is through the double’s violence that this anxious author articulates for herself the costly destructiveness of anger repressed until it can no longer be contained” (85). Given the pressures upon Montgomery to produce literature of a kind not only appropriate but pedagogical for a child readership, the strategy of creating a carefully



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layered text—child-safe on the surface, but with a “counter-text of rebellion” beneath (Rubio, “Subverting” 8)—may have met the demands of both readership and artist. Elizabeth, on whom the patriarchal culture’s abuse of power has been visited, thus becomes the traumatized victim and enraged villain who haunts *New Moon* and creates the conditions that the female writer must both confront and overcome on her artistic journey, a journey that must, on some level, grapple with the patriarchal literary world. The *Emily* novels take a great deal of inspiration from *Jane Eyre*,<sup>9</sup> but Montgomery may be making an important innovation when she allows her writer-heroine to confront and ultimately to make peace with the madwoman figure, whose abuse at the hands of patriarchy deserves to be acknowledged and needs to be brought to a healing close, not only for her own sake but for the sake of the woman writer, whose art may also flourish when freed from the bitter perpetuation of gendered hostilities.

*Anne of Green Gables* is as much about the education of the adult world as it is about the

education of Anne, and the same holds true for *Emily of New Moon*, but with the added resonance that comes from bringing a cycle of abuse to a close. Emily and Elizabeth’s decisive confrontation takes place when Elizabeth discovers Emily’s letters to her father. Here, Elizabeth finds herself represented in all her cold hostility and she shudders at it: “She read the letters and she found out what Emily thought of her—of her, Elizabeth Murray, autocrat unchallenged, to whom no one had ever dared to say anything uncomplimentary. Such an experience is no pleasanter at sixty than at sixteen. As Elizabeth Murray folded up the last letter her hands trembled—with anger, and something underneath it that was not anger” (*ENM* 325). Her reading experience is in fact a carefully mediated one. These are letters addressed to the beloved parent Emily has lost, now read by the insensitive, sometimes cruel parent-figure she has gained instead, who now sees herself, for the first time, through the child’s eyes. This carefully orchestrated encounter with Emily’s writing allows Elizabeth, finally, to see herself and to change,

bringing about an important healing shift in their relationship. Elizabeth initially confronts Emily in the parlour, sitting in Archibald's chair and thereby once again assuming the authority that poisoned her own upbringing and that has haunted all the darker moments of her tyranny over Emily to this point. Emily, in her outrage, once again summons the "Murray look," and, for a moment, their relationship appears hopelessly sunken in hostility and malevolence: "For the moment they faced each other, not as aunt and niece, not as child and adult, but as two human beings each with hatred for the other in her heart" (*ENM* 326). Here, Archibald's influence seems to have reached its height, as both women draw upon his power and both experience the infectious hatred that drives it. But in the lull that follows the fight, both Emily and Elizabeth relent: just as Emily resolves to ask Elizabeth for her forgiveness, Elizabeth appears at her bedroom door to ask for hers. Significantly, in the reconciliation that establishes a new, more equal footing for their relationship, Elizabeth sees in Emily not her hated father but instead her beloved sister: "I—don't like to think you—hate me—my sister's child—little Juliet's child" (*ENM* 329).

From the point of view of the "female Gothic," this is a crucial breakthrough because it disrupts the repetitive cycle of patriarchal tyranny that has

thus far bound Elizabeth's authority to Archibald's abuse of power: "What finally does lay Gothic horror to rest is the refusal of masculine authority as the only reality to which one can turn and return" (Massé 709). The "Murray look" does not occur again in *Emily of New Moon*, and in *Emily Climbs* and *Emily's Quest* it no longer features in Emily's relationship with Elizabeth. Indeed, from this point forward, Emily's supernatural inheritance comes not so much from patriarchal Archibald but from her mother's female forbears. Emily's gift of the "second sight" that allows her to see the true fate of Ilse's mother comes from her maternal great-grandmother, a Highland Scotswoman unrelated by blood to any of the Murrays.<sup>10</sup> It is this maternal inheritance, along with Emily's writing, that now becomes her defining strength and the necessary corrective to the trauma of patriarchal influence that plagues her early relationship with Elizabeth. Following their reconciliation, Emily and Elizabeth work together to solve the mystery of Ilse's mother, Emily's vision of Beatrice falling into the old Lee well proving accurate when Elizabeth acts on Emily's request to have the well searched. This allows Elizabeth to participate in the important revision of a misjudged woman's history and to bring to a perhaps cathartic close, for herself and for Beatrice, the motif that saw wells as symbolic reminders of familial rage and injury.<sup>11</sup>

Emily's task in this trilogy is to come of age as a woman and a family member and to join the adult community, while finding her own artistic path and voice. Though the first book puts Archibald's ghost largely to rest, the sense of a sinister patriarchal influence operating in the background continues to lend a Gothic subtext to the narrative, though the scene of conflict shifts from the family home to the outer worlds of career and courtship. Emily's relationship and subsequent engagement to Dean Priest bring her into what Massé calls the "marital Gothic," (682) wherein the husband or lover "'repeats' the role of the father" (682), initiating a new form of traumatic repetition that "allows us to consider how and why the figure who was supposed to lay horror to rest has himself become the avatar of horror who strips voice, movement, property, and identity itself from the heroine" (682). Montgomery's exploration of trauma—particularly the kind that works indirectly through familial and patriarchal influence—thus continues in the second and third novels as Emily struggles to keep her writing alive in the face of a deeply threatening romance plot.

At first glance, Dean Priest is a far cry from domineering Archibald and his "rod of iron," though he *is* old enough to be Emily's father. In fact, Dean has fond memories of Emily's father, with whom he went to school, and he initially

appears to be another of these nurturing men—like Emily's father and Cousin Jimmy—who are "coded feminine," their various weaknesses (Dean has a "malformed shoulder" and a limp) distinguishing them from the more marginal "brutes" like Archibald and the woman-hating Allan Burnley before he learns the truth of his wife's death. But in Dean's case, appearances are deceiving. Instead of echoing Emily's benevolent father, careful nurturer of her writing talent, he is an Archibald with much more sophisticated strategies for domination. Dean tends to appear when Emily is ill or in a weakened state, as he does following her bout with measles in *Emily of New Moon* and following her fall down the stairs in *Emily's Quest*. Though he seems to appreciate Emily's writing while she is a child, he gradually withdraws his approval, creating a desperate need in Emily to regain his admiration: "It has become a sort of obsession with me to *make* Dean admit I *can* write something worthwhile in its line. *That* would be triumph. But unless and until he does, everything will be dust and ashes. Because—he *knows*" (EQ 15–16). Where men in oppressive familial roles provide the Gothic sense of lurking abuse in Emily's childhood, it is their literary judgment that threatens to undermine her in adulthood—a more subtle form of sabotage that is nevertheless just as threatening to the heroine's selfhood and autonomy. Drew identifies Dean as

“the character most powerful (and dangerous) to Emily” because, “if she wants him, she must give up her writing, and with it the power to make her mark on patriarchal culture” (26).

Although the Murray men were no model husbands, the Priests have an even worse reputation. Old Jock Kelly, the “pedlar,” delivers the received wisdom on the Priest clan when he warns Emily, “don’t ye ever marry a Praste. . . . They’re ill to marry—ill to live with. The wives die young” (*ENM* 251). In fact, the patriarchally named Priest men are symbolically pitted against the Murray women in a deadly struggle wherein marriage means death for one partner or the other. Old Kelly reveals that it is the men who usually outlive the women, Great-Aunt Nancy being the exception that proves the rule (and she, too, warns Emily, “never marry a Priest” [*ENM* 266]). When Emily eventually tells Old Kelly that she will marry Dean and be very happy, he says, “Then you’ll be the first Praste woman that ever was, not aven laving out the ould Lady at the Grange. But *she* liked a fight every day. It’ll be the death av you” (*EQ* 66). Despite surviving her Priest husband by outfighting and outliving him, Great-Aunt Nancy has hardly escaped the Priest clan, for she lives with Caroline Priest, rumoured to be a witch, who (true to Priest fashion) outlives Nancy and ultimately inherits all of her considerable estate

(*EQ* 80).

Gabriella Åhmansson reads Dean as not just dangerous but murderous: “Dean simply must defeat the creator/writer, if he is to win Emily for his wife, and his campaign to do just that is both skilful and subtle. The murder of that part of Emily which is the writer is premeditated and carefully planned” (“Survival” 190). When Dean lies about the quality of her first novel, Emily says “you’ve just killed me” and asks him to leave her alone for a while: “The funeral will be over then” (*EQ* 52). She burns her manuscript and suffers a near-fatal fall on the stairs that lames her for seven months through the winter and precipitates her engagement to Dean and its “crippled, broken-winged happiness” (*EQ* 70). She doesn’t write again until after she breaks off the engagement, over a year and a half later, during which time Great-Aunt Nancy and Saucy Sal both die and Aunt Laura’s hair turns white. Finally, in a moment reminiscent of Robert Browning’s “My Last Duchess,” the portrait of a deceased wife warns her of past traumas likely to repeat themselves: “Dean Priest’s sad lovely mother. Yes, she had known fear; it looked out of her pictured eyes now in that dim, furtive light” (*EQ* 87). Once again, family history informs and even directs Emily’s present-day struggle. Though Emily survives in the end, her first novel—toward which she has fiercely maternal feelings—is lost





Emily halts the cycle and brokers a peace that will allow her to move forward as a woman and an artist, without the hatred in her heart that has poisoned other family members. . .



forever.

When Emily finally severs the engagement, her important capacity for healing and forgiveness saves her from harbouring the bitter resentment that has blighted the lives of her Murray forbears. Dean at last reveals that he lied about the quality of her manuscript, and Emily, even in her shock, realizes she must not become a participant in the legacy of Murray feuds and grievances: “I must not hold a grudge against Dean for this—like old Hugh Murray,” she thought confusedly. Aloud—“But I do—I do forgive it, Dean” (EQ 97–98). Rather than perpetuating the Priest-Murray war of the sexes or the Murray vice of holding a grudge, Emily halts the cycle and brokers a peace that will allow her to move forward as a woman and an artist, without the hatred in her heart that has poisoned other family members: “Emily pulled herself together. Something had happened—she was really free—free from remorse, shame, regret. Her own woman once more. The balance hung level between them” (EQ 97).

In fact, Emily’s ability to develop into an

assured woman and artist without re-enacting past battles—instead bringing them to a peaceful close—is a key characteristic that resonates with Mr. Carpenter’s heartfelt advice about writing that “It’s better to heal than hurt” (EC 29). Emily must decide, as part of her development, whether she will enter into the adversarial gender relations of the novels’ Gothic back story or instead find a more peaceful, healing path in her family life and her writing. There is hope that Emily, through her writing that heals and her second sight that rescues, may bend the Gothic conventions to her own use, transcending the battle-torn approach to gender relations in both her life and her art. Emily survives her deathly relationship with Dean, and her writing once more begins to flourish when she uses it to entertain Aunt Elizabeth, who is healing a broken leg. This act of compassion that unites artistic production with empathy for a past oppressor makes the once-stifling family setting the source of the mature female artist’s creative strength. Writing and reading a chapter a day to Elizabeth, Emily finally wins over her erstwhile

opponent, with writing that no longer demands the secrecy and defiance of earlier days but is instead a curative act of generosity.

This does not mean that Emily's writing fits neatly into a feminine ideal of bringing comfort and solace. Though Emily vows, at Mr. Carpenter's heartfelt urging, to use her pen to heal, not hurt, Montgomery makes it clear not only that Emily possesses the ability to wield a sharper pen, but also indeed that she takes a pleasure in doing so that somewhat belies her gentler moments. Having written a satirical obituary that reminds Mr. Carpenter of his own failures in life, Emily admits to a powerful and pleasurable sensation in writing it, which—like the “Murray look”—seems to possess her like some alien within: “a malicious, mocking *Something* that enjoyed making fun of poor, lazy, shiftless, lying, silly, hypocritical, old Peter DeGeer. Ideas—words—rhymes—all seemed to drop into place while that *Something* chuckled” (EC 28). Despite Mr. Carpenter's hurt feelings, she cannot destroy the piece, but hides it away to read secretly for her own enjoyment. Men tend to be the targets of Emily's occasional satirical outbursts; she amuses herself during one of Andrew Murray's visits by tuning out his conversation and simply responding “How wonderful!” whenever he pauses: “I did it exactly eleven times. Andrew liked it. . . . I think I'll try it again. Andrew is too stupid to catch me at

it” (EC 118). At a more formal dinner, Emily listens mutely all evening to the male guest of honour, who afterward reportedly found her “the best conversationalist of any girl of her age” he ever met. Emily writes in her journal, “So even great statesmen—but there—I won't be horrid” (EC 228), and she goes on to enumerate his many admirable qualities. In this passage, we see her satirical impulse assert itself, only to be conscientiously suppressed and replaced by a more proper reverence for male authority. Like Montgomery herself, who, as Rubio notes, often points her satire at patriarchy but then softens the effect or “sugarcoats all of her subversive elements with humour” (“Subverting” 20), Emily has an instinct for satire that she consciously learns to keep in check; hence, her potentially “horrid” observation on the dinner guest is censored and then sandwiched between paragraphs of almost too-fawning praise of the statesman's thoughts on the “fascinating game of empire building!” (EC 228). Emily's ability to deploy the “Murray look” or the satirist's keenly edged wit shows her in possession of the weapons she needs to survive and even to do damage in the patriarchal world if need be; that Montgomery has her choose not to wield those weapons suggests that her vision for Emily as the woman writer includes both the fierceness of an Elizabeth and the self-restraint necessary in a world where the

wounded are already too many. Montgomery makes it clear that Emily's virtue is a conscious choice, not a mere absence of malice, and we as readers are invited to enjoy the dual pleasure of ridiculing the Andrews and the pompous statesmen even as we approve Emily for more soberly taking the high road in the end.

Whether Emily's journey as an artist survives her eventual marriage to Teddy Kent is a question that has elicited much debate among readers. Rubio argues that when Emily finally accepts Teddy, "the tone is almost elegiac against a backdrop of a dark hill and a sunset, as Teddy and Emily prepare to move into their grey house which, significantly, has always been called 'The Disappointed House'" ("Subverting" 30). Marie Campbell adds that Mrs. Kent, whose all-consuming love for Teddy tortures both him and herself, is a warning of what Emily may become: "We are left with the sinking suspicion that life as Mrs. Kent, Teddy's wife, will not be any more publicly or privately rewarding" (140). Both suggest that Emily's writing career will die upon her marriage to Teddy. Even Ilse says, "he's selfish, Emily, he really is" (*EQ* 65). And finally, Teddy's habitual whistle that calls Emily to his side gives readers an uneasy feeling about the relationship's power dynamics. But Elizabeth Rollins Epperly is more hopeful. She points out that Teddy's

portrait of Emily—the work that establishes his career—portrays her in the moment of her own creative surge, the "flash" that inspires her art, and that he likens her in that moment to Joan of Arc, demonstrating his "instinctive recognition of and reverence for the spiritual warrior" embodied by Emily as the woman artist (171). That Emily had earlier adopted Teddy's portrait of her as a truer likeness than an unflattering photograph also attests to Emily's own sense that he sees her as she sees herself. Epperly asserts that "there is no question at the end of *Emily's Quest* that Emily will continue to write after she and Teddy are married" (195), and Dawn Sardella-Ayres agrees that Emily's union with him "is a possibility for unrestrictive, democratic, and unconventional marriage" (111). To read Emily's marriage to Teddy as the sacrifice of her art is, I think, to make Teddy into a second Dean, perpetuating the traumatic cycle of the marital Gothic that sees in the lover a sinister return of the tyrant father-figure. Teddy, however, has a troubled family legacy of his own, and in overcoming it he resembles Emily more than any male counterpart in the novels.

While Emily fought her childhood battles with the emotionally cold Aunt Elizabeth, Teddy was raised by a mother whose too-grasping love resulted in a similarly stifling environment. In fact, Elizabeth and Mrs. Kent echo each other in

more ways than one. While Elizabeth locks away books and looks for hidden letters to burn at New Moon, Mrs. Kent burns canvases at the Tansy Patch; moreover, both women carry out extermination campaigns against beloved pets. Elizabeth is haunted by the trauma of battles long past, but Mrs. Kent actually bears a physical marker of her troubled history, “a broad scar running slantwise across her pale face” (*ENM* 133). Mrs. Kent’s scar invites characters and readers alike to conjecture in Gothic fashion about what horrible scene could have resulted in such disfigurement, asking us to see Mrs. Kent, like Elizabeth, as the troubled victim of past trauma who now unwittingly visits that trauma on those under her care. Though the scar proves to have been the result of an accident with an exploding lamp, we learn it nevertheless played a part in the marital discord that so wounded her emotionally that she withdrew to a life of almost total isolation.<sup>12</sup> Once again, it is Emily who is lent the power to put past demons to rest when her discovery of a lost letter from Mrs. Kent’s deceased husband grants the forgiveness the widow has pined for all this time. And just as she forgave Dean earlier, Emily unhesitatingly forgives Mrs. Kent for her role in keeping her and Teddy apart. Emily’s ability to put conflict to rest and to heal family suffering once again serves to turn the plot, opening the way for her eventual

reunion with Teddy. Both Emily and Teddy honour their troubled caregivers and develop into artists despite the repressions of childhood. Montgomery doesn’t pair Emily with a male artist who has had automatic support and success, but creates instead a male counterpart similarly subject to a legacy of familial discord. The compassion the two artists show for their families, and, in Emily’s case, the ability to heal the wounds of the past, suggests that the artist’s role is not just as a creative individual, but also as an essential and curative member of both family and community. Teddy’s return to the community in the final pages of *Emily’s Quest* and his and Emily’s plans to settle there permanently would seem to bear this out, while also confirming Emily’s artistic project, which (unlike Teddy’s) has always made Blair Water its creative centre. Though Teddy’s critics suspect that the happy ending is merely Montgomery’s unwilling submission to saccharine public taste, I cannot help wanting to join in the more hopeful reading of the ending, where, incidentally, Emily, who has always come to Teddy’s call, hears behind her on the road “Teddy’s eager footsteps coming to *her*” (*EQ* 228).

Montgomery’s *Emily* novels explore a troubling, sometimes menacing patriarchal influence that is all the more insidious because it is a displaced, even deceased, presence that nevertheless keeps



Both Elizabeth and Dean drive Emily to set fire to her own beloved writings, suggesting that both figures function as dangerous avatars of an oppressive patriarchal assault on female creativity and the female artist.



returning, like a trauma that continues to be relived even when it should be long past. By employing a carefully muted Gothic mode that allows for the occasional haunting vision, Montgomery enhances the sense of a conflicted family legacy traced back through generations whose rest in the New Moon cemetery is markedly uneasy. Aunt Elizabeth and Dean Priest are both important arbiters of Emily's growth as a woman, family member, and artist, and these two bear the marks of past turmoil while bringing the old battles into the present in sometimes crippling ways. At different points, both Elizabeth and Dean drive Emily to set fire to her own beloved writings, suggesting that both figures function as dangerous avatars of an oppressive patriarchal assault on female creativity and the female artist. In defending her letters from Elizabeth's wrath, Emily declares she'd sooner burn herself than see them destroyed (*ENM* 327). Elizabeth's motives, though, are rendered more compelling when we pay heed to the clues to her own victimization at the hands of a tyrannical

father. Read with an understanding of these circumstances, she becomes the enraged victim of patriarchal domination, who, when granted power, can only express herself in unconscious repetition of that abuse of power. Her development, then, proves crucial when we recognize that she and Emily may be a contrasting, but in some ways a matched, pair, both enjoying the use of Archibald's intimidating power through the "Murray look," but both subject to the poisonous fear and resentment that inevitably infects that domineering authority. This subtle patriarchal control of their relationship and of the narrative is overthrown when they turn instead to the healing maternal influence whereby Elizabeth remembers that Emily is "my sister's child" (*ENM* 329). Elizabeth and Emily revise their relationship, and Emily, in writerly mode, returns to her letters and revises those that interpreted Elizabeth too harshly. In this way, Montgomery allows her readers the opportunity to revise their understanding of Aunt Elizabeth, a character who has undoubtedly drawn much criticism

heretofore. Part of Montgomery's innovation with Aunt Elizabeth is that she makes that signal figure of female rage—the wicked stepmother—into a fully-realized counterpoint for the heroine—one who is allowed the chance to develop alongside the heroine and thereby bring to the story of female selfhood a greater depth and diversity. As she develops into a mature writer in the second and third books of the trilogy, Emily continues to confront subtle patriarchal assault; Dean Priest

seeks to transform Emily's *Kunsterroman* into “marital gothic,” almost fatally undermining her ability to write. But Emily's writing contains an intrinsically healing force both for herself and for her readers, and one senses that just as she can revise her depiction of Elizabeth, she can use her art to shape both family and community in a new light, putting to rest past trauma and freeing her own narrative from the cobwebs of those patriarchal portraits.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I use the following abbreviations in parenthetical citations: *ENM* for Emily of New Moon, *EC* for *Emily Climbs*, and *EQ* for *Emily's Quest*.

<sup>2</sup> Eve Kornfeld and Susan Jackson introduce the concept of a “feminine utopia” found in the female *Bildungsroman*, using *Anne of Green Gables* and *Little Women* as examples; Gabriella Åhmansson develops this idea in relation to *Anne of Green Gables* in *A Life and Its Mirrors*.

<sup>3</sup> In *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, Elizabeth Rollins Epperly

attributes the phrase “female-clad patriarch” in relation to Aunt Elizabeth to Mary Rubio's 1989 IRSC paper, “Canada's Best-Known Children's Writer” (152). Rubio expands on the idea in “Subverting the Trite”: “Montgomery can present what she considers objectionable authoritarian male characteristics with impunity because she disguises them in the female form of Elizabeth Murray” (24). Ian Menzies refers to “the patriarchal Aunt Elizabeth” (60).

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth clings tightly to her beliefs about women's proper sphere, even in the face of Uncle Wallace's rational reminder

that Emily is an orphan with no inheritance to support her in the future, when New Moon itself will go to Oliver's son, Andrew Murray (ENM 314). Elizabeth also sees the "hired boy," Perry Miller, begin his higher education, and affords him increased respect as she recognizes that he will likely go on to better things. That she would allow for such progress in someone from "Stovepipe Town" but not in her own niece shows how ingrained her ideas on gender restriction must be.

<sup>5</sup> Åhmansson, in "The Survival of the Artist," and Lawson, in "The Alien at Home," also examine the Gothic elements at work in the *Emily* novels, focusing their attention, respectively, on Dean Priest and Mad Mr. Morrison.

<sup>6</sup> In *Emily of New Moon*, examples of links between Elizabeth's too-forceful discipline and references to Archibald include Emily's first night at New Moon (67), the apron-with-sleeves incident (86), the aborted hair-cut (117), Emily's opening of the blinds in the parlour (where Archibald's portrait hangs) resulting in her being banned from the parlour (107), Emily's rescue of the grey kitten Elizabeth had wanted drowned (158), and Elizabeth's thwarted intention to burn Emily's letters to her father (327).

<sup>7</sup> For discussion of the "female Gothic," see Fleenor, Ellis, DeLamotte, and Williams.

<sup>8</sup> This family tree includes the Murray family members identified in the novels, but there are gaps that Montgomery does not fill in. It is intimated, for instance, that Hugh and William both fathered large families, but their children are not named; we know only that one of Hugh's sons married one of William's daughters. Similarly, Archibald's generation

may have included more children who go unnamed. Cousin Jimmy's parents are also not named; since he is cousin to Elizabeth and Laura, his father may have been one of Archibald's brothers. This is not specified in the novels, hence his absence here.

<sup>9</sup> Epperly reads the *Emily* novels through Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, likening Dean Priest to Rochester and Emily's punishment in the spare room to Jane's in the red room (155–65). The moment when the beam of light falls on Archibald Murray's portrait corresponds to Jane Eyre's experience in the red room when "a light gleamed on the wall" (17), which strikes Jane as "a herald of some coming vision from another world" (17). The light causes Jane to cry out and rush to the door to beg for release; Emily, in an "ungovernable spasm of panic" (ENM 122), rushes to the window through which she escapes.

<sup>10</sup> Emily's maternal grandmother (mother to Juliet) was Archibald's second wife, stepmother to Elizabeth and Laura. Emily's maternal great-grandmother was the Highland Scotchwoman who bequeathed to Emily the "second sight" that allows Emily to see, in a vision, what became of Beatrice Burnley (also to locate the missing child in *Emily Climbs* and to communicate with Teddy from across great distance in both *Emily Climbs* and *Emily's Quest*). Thus, her ability comes from a lineage not shared by any of the Murrays.

<sup>11</sup> Lawson points out that "the well in which Beatrice Burnley meets her death is overdetermined in its context in the novel" ("Adolescence" 37). In addition to Cousin Jimmy's fall down a well and Elizabeth's subsequent guilt, Emily learns the story of how the Lee brothers quarrelled while working on the well, resulting in Silas striking and killing Thomas.

<sup>12</sup> Aileen Kent was happily married, despite the animosity of her husband's family, until her face was scarred from a lamp falling and lighting her dress on fire. After that, she couldn't believe her husband could truly love her and she "couldn't help quarrelling with him" (EQ 197). She also poisoned his

dog: "I don't know what possessed me. I never used to be like that—not till I was burned" (EQ 197). Mr. Kent found out and a bitter quarrel ensued. Immediately afterwards, he left on a business trip, fell ill, and died without their reconciling.

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