Interweaving Paracosms

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This videomusic is a glimpse into the world of L.M. Montgomery, inspired by the author's own paracosm, a detailed imaginary world that each of us creates within ourselves, where we find refuge and comfort.

Paracosme [videomusic]

Paracosme
Thu, 12/12/2024 - 14:56
lmmiassistant

Program Note

"I really never expected to get out with my eyes in my head."

—L.M. Montgomery, 4 Sept. 1890 (*CJ* 1: 46)

A paracosm is a detailed imaginary world that each of us creates within ourselves; it is where we find refuge and comfort. It can resemble an empirical reality or be a highly personal version of it, like when we invented worlds and games in childhood. Among the most famous paracosms is that of J.R.R. Tolkien, who enriched his childhood paracosm throughout his life, particularly during his time in the trenches during the First World War and transposed it to the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Janes). When they were children, Emily and Anne Brontë also developed an imaginary world called Gondal for their toys, a personal version of the Yorkshire moors with an annexed island called Gaaldine (Angerson), from which they took inspiration for their own novels and poems later in life ("Gondal").

My videomusic *Paracosme1* proposes a sound and visual immersion in my own internal world, where the world I live in remains palpable during the whole journey without ever being completely tangible. It is a musical portrait of a peaceful place that leaves room for daydreaming, a place that resembles what I build in my head as a refuge from the outside world.

L.M. Montgomery's Paracosm

When I was reading L.M. Montgomery's journals for the first time, I was amazed how her paracosm shaped many aspects of her creative process. By extrapolating elements of her everyday life, journals, books, and photographs, she built a world of her own in her novels and poems. To my knowledge, Montgomery never

explicitly mentioned the concept of paracosm to describe her internal world, but in a long journal entry on 7 January 1910 (when she was thirty-five years old), she seems to describe one:

For I had already begun to live that strange inner life of fancy which has always existed side by side with my outer life—a life into which I have so often escaped from the dull or painful real. It is one of the hardest things now, in these moods of nervous pain and sadness that overwhelm me that I cannot so escape, even for a time. The pain prevents the play of the imagination and holds me prisoner from that life of dream where I have roved in fairyland and had wonderful adventures and tasted strange sweet happiness unmarred by any cloud or shadow. (*CJ* 2: 259)

This statement shows us how her "strange inner life" was vital to her, and how she felt prevented from escaping to it in times of sadness. At other times in her life, writing saved her from her own struggles and helped her to escape "from the dull and painful real" when the "play of imagination" —the day-to-day permission to daydream—wasn't enough. Writing down her inner landscapes and adventures and rereading her old journal entries preserved her internal world when times were difficult.

Taking notice of how my own paracosm shaped the musician I am today, I composed this videomusic, which is an artform where "sound and image are blended in a unified perceptual space, where the aesthetic experience is driven primarily by the musical" (Piché and Boucher 13). *Paracosme* is something to look back to in my darkest moments. A little time capsule, to remember where to go to feel safe, like Montgomery with her journals and novels. She has put hints of her paracosm in her books and her journals. I decided to do the same in my artistic practice, to preserve my inner life in every way I can, one musical piece at a time.

L.M. Montgomery's Impact on My Practice

"I never can stop half way in an emotion. I must sound the deeps every time and sometimes they are like to drown me."

—L.M. Montgomery, 30 June 1902 (*CJ* 2: 57)

I rediscovered L.M. Montgomery's work during the pandemic, as I was isolated in my parents' house, running out of books to read. My mom kept the whole *Anne of Green Gables* collection that I had as a child, so I decided to read the first volume once again. My memories of first reading it were still sweet, as I was also a little girl named Anne who strongly related to the main character's imagination and awe of nature's beauty. Reading it years later made my inner Anne particularly happy. How much I still loved all those descriptions of Avonlea, which were still vividly living in my mind, after all this time. I was hooked, book after book.

Since then, I have been immersed in Montgomery's work—particularly her journals—trying, not very successfully, not to run through all she wrote at once. The journals opened me up to the mind of an incredible woman who created stories by building and cherishing her inner world. One of my favourite aspects of her writing is her well written, immersive descriptions of nature. It's like wandering in sounds and colours. I cannot help hearing the soundscape and plunging into all the colours and textures she lets us imagine, like in this passage of her journal:

The evening was very still, very calm, very clear. And through the stillness came the strangest, saddest, most unforgettable sound in nature—the soft, ceaseless wash on a distant shore of the breakers of a spent storm. It is a sound rarely heard and always to be remembered. It is more mournful than the rain wind of night—the heartbreak of all creation is in it. (*CJ* 3: 198)

When I look at nature, whether I am in the countryside or in the city, I can only think of how she would have loved to see it and to write about it. Would she appreciate as much as I do the sounds of all the birds singing unabashedly during the first lockdown in 2020, the crickets on a calm evening in August, or how the light reflects like diamonds on freshly fallen snow?

These descriptions—sometimes only one word or concept—are enough to intrigue me and inspire me to write music. In her journals, I have become acquainted with terms like *little tin gods*, *zodiacal light*, *solace*, *arcady*. Lover's Lane and the Lake of Shining Waters are also places full of inspiration, to which I would love to dedicate musical pieces someday.

As an artist, L.M. Montgomery arrived in my life when I needed her most. I was stuck musically, trying to find my own path in my electronic music studies. I've been an avid diarist all my life, building an internal world of my own. It was where a lot of my music compositions started without me even noticing it. By reading past entries, I could see words or concepts appearing and colliding with the music I was composing at the time. If I was stuck musically, seeing how my inner world was building up in my notebooks was enough to have the material and inspiration to finish a piece. That way, the music became more personal to me. I wasn't composing in thin air. Before, I never saw these notebooks as tools for composing. Montgomery gave me this idea. Words have impacted my soul and my practice. Why not hide words in music, by transforming what they mean into sounds? Instead of writing daily, why not compose or record a sound diary? The first piece I wrote with this compositional method is *Éphémérides*, an electroacoustic performance where I used sound journal entries. They were composed each day over the two months before the premiere and were played live on stage by improvisation. My most recent creation is *Solace*, also an electroacoustic performance, where I composed with the theme in mind of *finding solace*, recurrent in my journals and in Montgomery's. This performance attempts to find a path to solace, both for the musician and the audience, by performing melodies and soundscapes dear to me. The videomusic piece *Paracosme* was composed in the middle of it all, as a tribute to L.M. Montgomery who taught me to "never get out with my eyes in my head." (*CJ* 1 [4 Sept. 1890]: 46). I need to go deeper than what my eyes can see of the outside world. There is so much more to see, hear, touch out there when we take the time to observe and just *be*.

L.M. Montgomery has impacted how I envision music pieces and how I perform them. She has encouraged me to keep my inner voice up front and to let no one tell me to tone it down. Her literary legacy being *words* and my work being *sounds*, we meet in our need to visit our paracosm often and to share bits of it with the world. To me, sharing those pieces is the core of being an artist. With all the inspiration her journals and books give me, I want to recreate soundscapes where we—myself and the audience—can feel the most at home. I wish to show the countless sounds of my inner world and to give the audience the same feeling you have when you're doing things you love. And I still immerse myself in Montgomery's paracosm from time to time, because hers enriches my own as if we are woven in the same fabric.

Bio: Marie Anne Bérard (she/her) is a Montreal-based composer and keyboardist. Her practice focuses on electroacoustic and audiovisual performances, sound installation and the use of sound journalling as a compositional method. She is also interested in the mediation of electroacoustic music. With financial support from the *Observatoire interdisciplinaire de création et de recherche en musique* (OICRM) and the *Observatoire des médiations culturelles* (OMEC), she is currently working on a master's degree in sound creation at the Université de Montréal. Her research-creation focuses on the effects of music mediation with the elderly on her creative process as a sound artist. Her performance *Éphémérides* (2021) was awarded the Martin-Gotfrit-Martin-Bartlett prize in the Jeu de temps/Times play (JTTP) competition.

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- 1 The title of this piece is written in French, which accounts for the different orthographies of the word paracosm.

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Banner image: Visual excerpt from the videomusic "Paracosme" by Marie Anne Bérard.