A Celebration of Montgomery's Legacy: Journal of L.M. Montgomery Studies Mental Health Collection Revisited

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Late in 2020, Jean Mitchell and I put in place a plan that had been brewing for months during COVID-19 shutdowns as we witnessed family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, and the world in general struggling to maintain not only healthy bodies but also healthy minds. As scholars of L.M. Montgomery and consulting editors for the *Journal of L.M. Montgomery Studies* (*JLMMS*), Jean and I understood the importance for so many of us of reading Montgomery's books and discussing them with a community of readers. As Yoshiko Akamatsu writes, "There has been a growing consciousness about mental health in the twenty-first century, heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic, which upended the daily lives of people all over the world, preventing them from leaving their homes, socializing, and enjoying outdoor activities. Reading L.M. Montgomery's novels during the quarantines and subsequent lockdowns helped many to cope with and navigate a world inundated with a sense of isolation and loss." Jean and I put out a call for submissions on "L.M. Montgomery and Mental Health," which resulted in the publication of the eight creative pieces and papers now in the JLMMS online collection.

Further Reading on Mental Health and COVID-19:

Lesley Clement and Kate Scarth, "How Montgomery Inspires Us During Times of Crisis"

Merav Fima, "Rereading *Anne* in the Time of Coronavirus"

Andrea McKenzie, "Reading *Rilla* through COVID-19"

Fast-forward five years to our wanting to profile and honour in some way these eight reflections on "Montgomery and Mental Health" and the research before and after their publication. I invited Rita Bode and Margaret Steffler, whose work has contributed so substantially to Montgomery scholarship and who both sit on the *JLMMS* editorial board, to assist me in reviewing this body of research. We decided to aim for a release date of our "*Journal of L.M. Montgomery Studies* Mental Health Collection Revisited" the first week in May 2026 to coincide with Canadian Mental Health Week (4–10 May). My indebtedness and gratitude to Jean, Rita, and Margaret as scholars and friends speak to the value of a stimulating community for sound mental health.

Jean Mitchell's interest in Montgomery and mental health predates the *JLMMS* project as evidenced by her 2018 article "L.M. Montgomery's Neurasthenia: Embodied Nature and the Matter of Nerves." For our purposes, what is most helpful here is Mitchell's discussion of troubled minds being stigmatized as unhealthy minds and a consequence of bodily malfunctions, instead of being diagnosed and labelled as mental illness as they would be today:

> While "mental illness" imposes a set of codified definitions of illness that now prevail, during Montgomery's lifetime symptoms of depression and anguish were not inevitably or solely located in the mind. One of the key features of neurasthenia was the idea that the illness was located in the body rather than the mind or, as Eric Caplan notes in *Mind Games*, it was about "*soma* not *psyche*." (114)1

Mitchell and, before her, Helen Buss and Janice Fiamengo discuss the implications of Montgomery's journal statement from 7 February 1910 that her unwellness was of anything but the mind: "I have had a month of nervous prostration—an utter breakdown of body, soul, and spirit. … I thank God I do not come of a stock in which there is any tendency to insanity. If I had I believe that my mind would have given way hopelessly" (*CJ* 2: 281). Societal perceptions of mental unwellness and family pride meant that, as was so often the case in Montgomery's (and many artists') situations, writing was a fundamental therapeutic mechanism for coping and a way toward healing.

In her 1994 *Mapping Ourselves: Canadian Women's Autobiography*, Buss asks, "How would the father of psychoanalysis have diagnosed Montgomery if she had had the fortune to be born in Vienna instead of Prince Edward Island?" and goes on to make suggestions of what Freud might have concluded through his gendered lens such as "female melancholia" or, more likely, "hysteria" (166–67). Writing eleven years later, in her essay in Irene Gammel's collection *The Intimate Life of L.M. Montgomery*, Fiamengo observes that "[w]hereas Buss focuses on [Montgomery's] depression as stark evidence for the conflicts that bedevil a creative woman in a patriarchal society, I am interested in the depression as a problem—and ultimately, for Montgomery, a strategy—of representation" (171). Fiamengo concludes that in her journals, Montgomery's "record of private pain" was also "a strategy of self-articulation," which "resisted depression's sentence of meaninglessness and despair" (184). All three critics—Mitchell, Buss, and Fiamengo—situate neurasthenia, depression, anguish, despair, melancholia, hysteria, and other conditions now often labelled "mental illness" within the historical context of the growth of specialized medical fields and therapies. All three consider whether these conditions are societal, circumstantial, psychological, physical, or some combination, and, in so doing, all three warn against labelling a writer's mental state and conflating it with fictionalized representations, whether autobiographical or filtered through characters. Discussing "Virginia Woolf's depressive episodes," Fiamengo quotes Hermione Lee's caution, "To name the illness is to begin a process of description which can demote [the writer's] extraordinary personality to a collection of symptoms, or reduce her writing to an exercise in therapy" (174).2

As Rita, Margaret, and I revisited the *JLMMS* Mental Health collection and the literature that preceded and followed it, we identified three key areas of often overlapping exploration, each of us taking up some of the topics within these areas to research and write about.3 We begin with a section on "Gender, Sex, and Sexuality," which lays the foundation of relevant and important changes society was undergoing that called into question suppositions about mental health. The second section examines sources of "Loss and Trauma." The third section again turns to changes that society was undergoing and how these changes affected "Therapies and Healing Practices." We see all these topics explored in the final section that revisits the "Eight Reflections on Montgomery and Mental Health: Montgomery's Legacy" in the *JLMMS* collection.

1. Gender, Sex, and Sexuality

> Montgomery scholarship has largely proceeded on the assumption that Anne is "naturally" heterosexual, an assumption that allows for feminist interpretations which highlight the heroine's empowerment. Critics such as Mary Rubio, Elizabeth Epperly, and Shirley Foster and Judy Simons agree that Montgomery criticizes or challenges her society, particularly its patriarchal structures. However, her challenge is couched in conventional terms.
>
> —Laura Robinson, "Bosom Friends" (13)

Laura Robinson published her iconoclastic article "Bosom Friends: Lesbian Desire in L.M. Montgomery's Anne Books" in 2004, acknowledging the critics before her who had laid the groundwork for new ways of perceiving gender, sex, and sexuality in Montgomery's canon.[4]These are perhaps the avenues that have since taken the most oblique turns off conventional paths in Montgomery criticism, especially through a mental-health perspective. The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Ontario states that in terms of gender, sex, and sexuality, non-conformist people "face higher risks for some mental health issues due to the effects of discrimination and the social determinants of health" and that "[t]hree significant determinants of positive mental health and wellbeing are: social inclusion; freedom from discrimination and violence; and access to economic resources" ("Lesbian"). While these observations were made within a twenty-first-century framework of what constitutes heteronormativity and what constitutes mental health, similar problems characterize Montgomery's world, a time when antinormative behaviour was being stigmatized and queerness pathologized.

a. Pathologizing Queerness: What Constitutes Mental Health?

> Queerness: "the destabilizing of norms related to binarized gender, sex, and sexuality and the consequent valuing of process and opening up of possibilities that challenge and deviate from these norms …"
>
> —Lesley Clement, "Heartstopping"

The labelling and pathologizing of those seen to be destabilizing gender, sex, and sexuality norms as "queer" came at a time post–First World War when the social and legal redefinitions of gender roles coincided with psychologists' discussions of sex and sexuality within binarized gender frames. Twentieth-century Montgomery critics generally considered gender destabilization more in terms of social subversion than of mental illness or health; however, more recently, gender has been linked with discussions of sex or sexuality or both and taken on more of a psychological interest.

An example of the intersection of social subversion and psychological interest can be seen in Irene Gammel's 1999 essay "'My Secret Garden': Dis/Pleasure in L.M. Montgomery and F.P Grove," which situates Montgomery's *Emily* trilogy during the 1920s, "a decade of fervent nationalist activity in Canada" that reflects Montgomery's being "intimately interested in shaping the nation's sexual health through literature" (245). As specifically conveyed through the subtext of the trilogy, Gammel contends, Montgomery's depiction of "subversive eros as essential for the health and well-being of her heroines" (248) plays out against a changing backdrop of women's rights politically, legally (for example, divorce [250]), and socially.

Gammel mentions the "eroticized girl crushes" in *Emily of New Moon* as expanding "Montgomery's template for powerfully emotional female attachments" but thinks that the author "encodes a warning about the destructive nature of such infatuations," that is, of "girl-girl attraction" (239–40). It is noteworthy that in the late winter of 1930, Montgomery saw Isobel Anderson's passionate behaviour in encounters with Montgomery as that of a

lesbian. Based on her reading "in certain malodorous works of fiction" and "the cleaner medium, of medical volumes," she viewed Isobel's behaviour as an inherited mental deficiency, labelling her "a pervert" (*CJ* 7 [1 Mar. 1930]: 10). Their one-sided friendship persisted for several years until Montgomery firmly ended it, concluding "[t]he girl is not sane and I deserve all I have got for being fatuous enough to think I could help her or guide her back to normalcy" (*CJ* 7 [22 Jan. 1933]: 298).

Robinson's 2000 paper at the annual Canadian Learned Societies meeting, "Bosom Friends," and its 2004 publication in *Canadian Literature*, became a pivotal moment in a fuller and more nuanced understanding of the representation of queerness in Montgomery's fiction. As in the Gammel article, Robinson situates the pathologizing of queerness, specifically same-sex attraction, within both biographical and historical considerations in the early decades of the twentieth century; it was in the 1920s that "mainstream culture began to view the love between women as threatening, pathological, and unacceptable," a consequence of such factors as new freedoms for women and a new interest in sexology (16). Robinson argues that the depiction of single women and Anne's passionate friendships with Diana Barry, Katherine Brooke, and Leslie Moore "present a quiet challenge to traditional patriarchy" (19) that "disturb[s] complacent attitudes" (26); later critics will, however, consider this complacency and its disturbance as more threatening to mental well-being than simply a "quiet challenge."

Further Readings on Queerness and Mental Health in Response to Robinson's "Bosom Friends":

Cecily Devereux, "Anatomy of a 'National Icon': *Anne of Green Gables* and the 'Bosom Friends' Affair"

Stephanie Nolen, "Avonlea All Astir"

Tom Spears, "'Outrageously Sexual' Anne Was a Lesbian, Scholar Insists"

Gavin White, "Falling Out of the Haystack: L.M. Montgomery and Lesbian Desire"

While Montgomery scholars such as Gammel and Robinson profile the empowering subversive and even transgressive nature of the actions taken by many of the author's characters, actions that underpin their mental health, this is not the queer resistance that later critics such as Katharine Slater in "'A Ghost You Can *Feel* and *Hear* but Never *See*': Queer Hauntings in *Emily of New Moon*" (2024) and Lesley Clement in "Heartstopping Moments: Rainbow Joy, Queering Spaces, and Shaping Futurities in L.M. Montgomery's *Anne* and *Emily* Novels" (2025) discern in Montgomery's challenging genderized concepts of desire and happiness and how they relate to mental health. Like Robinson, Slater too contextualizes Montgomery's characters historically but focuses more on the changes that had taken place in the early decades of the twentieth century with "the consolidation of same-sex sexual acts into a pathological identity—homosexuality" and the growing public perception of "sexual inversion" as a professionally codified mental illness (146). This coincided with the period when "Western medical communities began to pathologize homosexuality, building it into an identity rather than a series of acts, [and] scripts of temporal maturation for youth produced a new narrative of standard development" (147). Whereas Anne's defiance of heteronormative patterns and narratives is certainly transgressive and enables her to survive the effects of a traumatizing early life, as discussed below, it is Emily, both Slater and Clement argue, whose defiance through "queer intimacies" (Slater 156) and "queer joy" (Clement) subverts and transforms what at the time would be deemed mental "illness" into mental "health." As

well, Emily's defiance becomes a resistance that questions the "mental health" of society.

Both Slater and Clement tap into Sara Ahmed's critique of "the promise of happiness" for an understanding of the mental unhealth of society. Much earlier, Buss spoke in passing about the gendering of happiness in response to Montgomery's 24 October 1911 journal entry about "absolute happiness and comparative happiness" (Montgomery concedes hers is the latter: Buss 168; *CJ* 3: 52), but it is this recent work of Slater and Clement that critiques this happiness in psychological terms. Can happiness be equated with mental health? "To deviate from the cardinal signs of happiness—to express a deep unhappiness that bonds you queerly to another—is also to deviate from the straightening rod of placid assimilation that braces *New Moon*'s social community," Slater states (153). For Clement, Montgomery's "straightening" of Anne and Anne's children prevents "their realizing their queer potential in adulthood," a potential for queer joy often experienced in childhood. With Emily, however, we see Montgomery "infusing her unhappiness script—a counteraction to Ahmed's 'happiness script' … —with queer joy, and so helping to build an 'unhappy queer archive'"[5] that provides representation for the coexistence of unhappiness and mental health. Emily's "happiness," Clement points out, will be "A Different Kind of Happiness," the title of Chapter 24 of *Emily of New Moon* that takes place at Wyther Grange and exposes the young girl to what Slater refers to as the "pathological sapphism" of the Priest aunts (148–49). Whereas Slater focuses on "the queer intimacies … as affirming antinormative ways of being in a relationship" in "a less uniform world" (156), Clement views Emily's mental state as that "of a young protagonist who finds joy in her life and her vocation … from both rootedness and flow by accepting the queer challenges inherent in resilience, resistance, reparation from childhood and inherited trauma, and reclamation of her sense of worth and belonging in the face of queer-coded otherness, her own and others.'" For Clement, the *Emily* trilogy is not only socially subversive but also psychologically reparative because it shows "the potential to transform hope and fear into a queer joy that resists and challenges the old orders of reproductive futurism."

b. White Feathers and Shell Shock: Dehumanizing Men and Women

Yesterday we were young who now are old …
  We fought hot-hearted under a sweet sky,
The lust of blood made even cowards bold,
  And no one feared to die;
We were all drunken with a horrid joy,
  We laughed as devils laugh from hell released,
And, when the moon rose redly in the east,
I killed a stripling boy!

—Montgomery, Stanza 1, "The Aftermath" (*BAQ* 509; ellipsis in original)

The psychological toxicity of binarized gender roles prescribed by an unhealthy society has also been at the heart of discussions pertaining to war. Kazuko Sakuma's "The White Feather: Gender and War in L.M. Montgomery's *Rilla of Ingleside*" picks up a point made by Owen Dudley Edwards that "the persecution of Walter before he enlists … suggests a social sickness beneath the pro-war patriotism" (28; ellipsis in original).[6] It is not that "fixed gender roles" are destabilized to the point that Walter "doubt[s] his gender identity" as male (31) that Sakuma finds unhealthy. Nor is it the "excessive female patriotism … [that] could turn women into callous and cruel offenders during the conflict" (27) when targeting men on the home front with a symbol of cowardice, the white feather. Society's unhealthiness is, rather, "[t]he undeniable inhumanity of this way of treating individuals … which points to the suffering these forces of destruction demand" (39), including the "symbolic suicide" of Walter when he decides to enlist (34).

For Clement, in two essays—the previously cited “Heartstopping Moments” published in *JLMMS* (2025) and the essay on which it builds, “From ‘Uncanny Beauty’ to ‘Uncanny Disease’: Destabilizing Gender through the Deaths of Ruby Gillis and Walter Blythe and the Life of Anne Shirley” (2021)—Walter’s suicide is not simply “symbolic” but a very real representation of a traumatic response to the sickness of a society dictating binarized gender norms. As Clement argues in the earlier essay, the piper haunting *Rainbow Valley* and *Rilla of Ingleside*, especially as aligned with Peter Pan, and Walter’s poem “The Aftermath” in *The Blythes Are Quoted* reflect a death wish, manifested in Walter and in “all those idealistic young men who have witnessed and engaged in actions that leave them in a world to which they can no longer commit.” Walter’s behaviour, Clement maintains, also reflects “possible signs of shell shock” as a response to the traumatizing liminal space of No Man’s Land. Historians Martin Stone and Mark Humphries have shown shell shock to be a ‘mass epidemic’ with 40 to 50 per cent of those invalided out of heavy fighting zones by the end of 1916 being soldiers suffering from various forms of war trauma. … [C]ourage [was] exploited as a recruitment tool and a mechanism to foster camaraderie in the trenches [that] contributed to a feminized ‘pathology of shellshock’ that challenged ‘idealized masculinities.’[7]

In the trenches, the soldier becomes one of Sandra Gilbert’s “*un*men” in an “‘inhumane new era and a citizen of the unpromising new land into which this war of wars had led him’” (“From ‘Uncanny Beauty’” 56–57).[8] From the perspective of queerness in the later *Anne* novels, Clement develops in her most recent essay, “[t]his ‘new era’ and ‘new land’ will ultimately self-destruct rather than repair and regenerate” (“Heartstopping”). The trauma runs too deep.

2. Loss and Trauma

Trauma
Trauma is the lasting emotional response that often results from living through a distressing event. Experiencing a traumatic event can harm a person’s sense of safety, sense of self, and ability to regulate emotions and navigate relationships. Long after the traumatic event occurs, people with trauma can often feel shame, helplessness, powerlessness and intense fear.

—The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

Montgomery’s fiction and life story remind us that trauma—the “lasting emotional response” associated with loss and the consequent grief and mourning—linger well beyond the catalyst, the “distressing event,” and trigger a multitude of long-term repercussions. In “‘To the Memory of’: Leaskdale and Loss in the Great War,” Mary Beth Cavert focuses on the traumatic responses to the deaths of soldiers serving during the First World War and of those who succumbed to the postwar influenza pandemic, specifically for Montgomery three local soldiers and her cousin and best friend, Frederica Campbell MacFarlane (Frede), who died in January 1919. Cavert shows how the dedications to *Rainbow Valley* (1919) and *Rilla of Ingleside* (1921) are “invitations to unearth the interconnected stories of those whom Montgomery urges us to remember” (35). Cavert unravels the stories that created a “memory-filled home” for Montgomery in Leaskdale and that “summoned her deepest grief” (53). This section on “Loss and Trauma” will unravel more of these stories of trauma for Montgomery in her fiction and life-writings.

a. Aftermath of War: “The Scar Will Always Be There”

[9]

> To be faithful to her own code of providing a happy ending and at the same time to be believably truthful about a writer's challenge to withstand despair, Montgomery may leave out the war [in *Emily's Quest*], but she does not leave out suffering and grief. In her own life, she could not erase little Hugh's death or Frede's, her husband's mental illness, or the war, but she could put them into her house of life in such a way that they could be preserved in relationship with the healing land. Owning the Disappointed House, metaphorically, is vital.
>
> —Elizabeth Epperly, "*Emily's Quest*" (214)

In her 2021 article "'The Clock Is Dead': Temporality and Trauma in *Rilla of Ingleside*," comparing Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway and Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party" to Montgomery's *Rilla of Ingleside* (with concluding remarks about *The Blythes Are Quoted*), Daniela Janes observes that "these stories written in the aftermath of the war … foreground the process of making meaning out of traumatic death" (131). Janes roots her analysis of the impact of Walter's death on surviving family members in the theoretical observations of Cathy Caruth[10]regarding the inevitable disjuncture caused by the "belatedness" of the traumatic response, which causes temporal ruptures between the experience of the triggering event(s) and the experience of trauma itself" (136). Whereas *Rilla of Ingleside* has a "romance resolution" in that "happiness will be found in domesticity, marriage, motherhood, and making meaning out of the sacrifice of the Great War … Walter cannot adequately anticipate the lingering trauma resulting from his own death." This means that *The Blythes Are Quoted* is not just a novel about the aftermath of war but is, more precisely, "an example of what Philip D. Beidler calls 'the literature of aftermath' (1). The term describes the 'spectral presence of the war, its continuing role in the memory culture of life' (3) in the literature of the interwar period" (138).[11] In the later novel, there can be no "romance resolution": "for the Blythe family the trauma of war remains open and unresolved," not just for the older generation but for "the young people who were imagined as immune to the trauma of a life divided in two" by war (139–40).

Another essay that examines the trauma of the aftermath of war in Montgomery's final novel and compares it to the work of Woolf is Catherine Clark's "Creative Vision, Grief, and Memory in L.M. Montgomery's *The Blythes Are Quoted* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*." Clark focuses on the way that "the production and consumption of art strengthen memory, and creative work helps negotiate grief and loss." But Clark is also interested in how biographical trauma entered into the creative process. She begins by observing the "childhood traumas" and "depressive episodes" that Woolf and Montgomery both experienced, but it is their final years that most interest her because "when mental or physical health impeded their writing, life's meaning slipped away." Clark outlines the fears that Montgomery had that her sons would be called to war, her struggle with depression and addiction to prescribed barbiturates, and the possibility that her death was suicide, all points discussed later. While "Woolf and Montgomery develop artists who manage to create meaning after the war" that sustains them and their surviving family members—and levy the death penalty for those who cannot (Walter in Montgomery's *Rilla of Ingleside* and Septimus Smith in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*)—for their creators, the scars of war immeasurably affect their mental health.

Because "the trauma of war remains open and unresolved" (Janes 139), the stories of those with traumatizing scars, regardless of age or gender, are diverse and ongoing. Janes's and Clark's readings of *The Blythes Are Quoted* align with what Susan Erdmann concludes in "Double Vision in *The Blythes Are Quoted*: Reading External References." Discussing the final conversation and words in *The Blythes* when Jem says, "Who was it said, 'We forget because we must?' He was right" (510), Erdmann identifies the quotation as being from Matthew Arnold's "The Absence": "Jem seems to be arguing that forgetting functions as a psychological survival mechanism and a defence against painful memory and that Walter's poem ['The Aftermath'] claims that forgetting is impossible for those who have experienced trauma. Arnold's poem, on the other hand, proposes that

forgetting works counter to the natural desires of the individual." While the aftermath of war was haunted by absences, absences are traumatizing in many other ways in Montgomery's stories, biographical and fictional.

b. Motherhood: Absence and Presence

> Oh, it is not fair—it is not fair! Children are born and live where they are not wanted—where they will be neglected—where they will have no chance. I would have loved my baby so … Yet I was not allowed to have him.
>
> —Montgomery, *CJ* 3 (30 Aug. 1914): 163

Motherhood, as both absence and presence, presented Montgomery throughout her life with both challenges and gratifications that deeply affected her emotional and psychological states as well as her writing. As her journals attest, and as critical commentary notes, the early death of her mother led to a lifetime of mourning and searches for the missing mother. The death of Clara Woolner Macneill in 1876, when Montgomery herself was less than two years old, created a void that the living daughter tried continually, imaginatively, and creatively to fill. As Rita Bode points out in "L.M. Montgomery and the Anguish of Mother Loss," Montgomery was deeply troubled by the unknowability of her deceased mother and imagined and re-imagined her in many revisions. In her fiction, Montgomery created maternal configurations that included the oppressive gatekeeper of a daughter's potential, such as Mrs. Stirling in *The Blue Castle* or Grandmother Kennedy in *Jane of Lantern Hill*, and Teddy Kent's pathologically damaged and damagingly possessive mother, but also opened up to realizations of the potential to grow into supportive, caring motherhood not only as biological mothers and maternal kin, but by unrelated spinster women, such as Marilla, or, indeed, male maternal figures such as Matthew in the first *Anne* book and Cousin Jimmy in the *Emily* books. Montgomery coped with the yearning for her dead mother by positioning motherhood as an endless possibility in a multitude of stories that crossed social and gender lines to bring forth the value of care and respect for and human responsiveness to the individuality and well-being of another, regardless of age differences.

Further Readings on Mental Health and Orphanhood:

Ashley Cowger, “From ‘Pretty Nearly Perfectly Happy’ to ‘the Depths of Despair’: Mania and Depression in L.M. Montgomery's Anne Series”

Shea Keats, “‘A Shock of Joy’: Transformative and Triumphant Trauma in the Fiction and Life-Writing of L.M. Montgomery”

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

Rob Shields, “Lifelong Sorrow: Settler Affect, State and Trauma at *Anne of Green Gables*”

Katharine Slater, “‘The Other Was Whole’: *Anne of Green Gables*, Trauma and Mirroring

Motherhood as a presence also wrought disturbances when Montgomery herself became a mother. The birth of her first son, Chester, brought her an intense joy in which she fully revelled, but it also stirred up deep anxieties about motherhood, children, and loss. Margaret Steffler, in “Performing Motherhood: L.M. Montgomery’s Display of Maternal Dissonance,” traces this conflict in Montgomery’s life-writing as Montgomery records her own successes in a maternal performance aligning with cultural expectations while at the same time providing details that subvert its truths. Caroline Jones also engages this tension between public and private mothering in “The New Mother at Home: Montgomery’s Literary Explorations of Motherhood,” suggesting that the birth of Chester led Montgomery to consider the “institution of motherhood” (92) itself and to its subsequent exploration in her novels from the perspective of being both mothered and mothering, of both mother and daughter. Becoming a mother brought Montgomery closer to her own mother—“How near I feel to her now in my own motherhood,” she writes in her journal entry of 10 October 1912 (*CJ* 3: 87)—but it also increased her anxieties and threatened her mental well-being as both writer and mother.

The enduring conflict for writing mothers between books and babies loomed large in her struggles to find time to continue her creative work, as Jones points out in her essay on “The New Mother at Home,” and adding to these worries was her keen awareness of the vulnerability of children that her own early experiences as a sensitive child, frequently wounded by thoughtless and dismissive adults, had already confirmed. Chester’s birth intensified her sense of the helplessness of the young in a world where adult status inevitably claimed all the power. She writes in her journal on 12 September 1912, “Always when I read of a child being neglected or ill-used, I would thrill with indignation and horror. But now I can scarcely endure to read such a thing because of the anguish it causes me—for in every child I see my own child—and I picture him undergoing that. I have cried aloud at the pain that came with such a picture” (*CJ* 3: 73).

Motherhood made Montgomery experience the profound grief of loss in another way with the stillbirth of her second son, Hugh. Both Hilary Emmett in “‘Mute Misery’: Speaking the Unspeakable in L.M. Montgomery’s *Anne* Books” and William Thompson in “The Shadow on the House of Dreams: Montgomery’s Re-Visioning of Anne” point out that the week of baby Hugh’s birth and death in August of 1914 coincided with the declaration of war in Europe. Both studies also focus on the effect that the coming together of this profound personal loss

and the deep anxiety of world violence had on the later *Anne* novels. Emmett traces the ways in which Montgomery draws on her maternal mourning to give the "generalized grief at the senseless loss of a generation of young Canadian men" (82) an intimate and individualized expression that resists the panacea of facile platitudes through the representations of deep and intense sorrow. The maternal focus is only one aspect of Emmett's discussions, but she effectively shows Montgomery's determination to provide a viable space for mourning, which becomes itself a means of coping with grief. Thompson's chapter invokes Montgomery's maternal loss to explore the movement between her journal-writing and her fiction as she comes to terms with protecting a private grief while at the same time finding some outlet for public expression for her own loss as well as for wartime mourning. He focuses specifically on "Montgomery's re-visioning of Anne" that was influenced by Montgomery's experiences of loss and grief during her first decade in Ontario. Thompson suggests that the intentional intersecting of the journals with the fiction allowed Montgomery to move Anne and Anne's creator toward a quiet if not completely resolved reconciliation with grief and loss on both personal and global levels.

In her chapter "Like a Childless Mother: L.M. Montgomery and the Anguish of Mother's Loss," Tara Parmiter shows mother loss becoming mother's loss with the stillbirth of Hugh, a sorrow on which Montgomery drew in her fiction through the death of Anne's Joy in *Anne's House of Dreams*. Building on the critical discussion of motherhood and loss by Bode and Emmett, among others, Parmiter explores the transitions between Montgomery's lived experience of pain and its re-creations in her fiction, a process that provides an intimate view of the mother's inner life. As Parmiter argues, drawing on her mourning for baby Hugh, Montgomery had the fictional Joy disrupt her mother's maternal identity. In Parmiter's view, the fictional loss allows Montgomery a transgressive mode of grief that points to the inadequacy of Christian consolation and forbearance in the face of adversity.

Montgomery went on to have another son, Stuart, but mother's loss took a different turn in Montgomery's life through her disappointments concerning her sons, especially Chester, as they grew into adulthood. Here, too, she found little solace in traditional Christian teachings and beliefs, as is discussed later in the section on "Religion: Embracing the Spiritual." In a 1937 entry of 8 February, she writes that "Stuart is a good boy," but her comment comes in the context of a kind of heartfelt cry over the hardships and disappointments of motherhood that she endures over Chester's situation: "Dear God," she states, "was it such a sin to love them that my heart must be wrung like this? And how many mothers have asked the same question?" (*SJ* 5: 145). The impact of the loss of sons, both personally and globally, never left Montgomery. Montgomery's war novel, *Rilla of Ingleside*, centres a motherhood that contends with a maternal agony beyond reparation, and yet, it also turns to the kind of generous response to another's vulnerability that motherhood entails when Rilla finds a way to serve in caring for the war-baby Jims.

In her representation of motherhood, Montgomery's contributions to mental well-being offer ways of regaining mental equilibrium and an existence that allows for much joy, but her work also contributes to mental health by representing the ways in which the inner life can be disturbed and derailed. Her novels are invested in accepting sadness and mourning—life's shadows—not passively and complacently for themselves, but as part of being fully human. This kind of acceptance is also a viable pathway toward healing.

c. Memory: A Blessing and a Curse

I seem to have been living over my whole past life today, from my earliest recollection. I have been haunted and tortured by old memories.

—Montgomery, *CJ* 2 (7 Jan. 1910): 249

Life's shadows were not just external but also internal. Montgomery refers to her "somewhat remarkable memory" as "an advantage which, like everything else, has its shadow" (*CJ* 2 [7 Jan. 1910]: 249). While her highly developed memory was the foundation of her inspiration for her fiction, it was often "so tenacious and vivid that she could not escape what she remembered" (Rubio and Waterston, "Untangling" 283). "Given to reliving everything in the past over and over—in her journals, in her writing, and in her imagination" (Rubio, *Lucy Maud* 467), Montgomery depended heavily on her extraordinary memory of literary works and her own past. She often refers to her "remarkably vivid *visual memory*" (*SJ* 5 [2 July 1936]: 75), which Epperly argues is closely connected with the approaches and techniques of romantic poetry, particularly the work of William Wordsworth (*Through Lover's Lane* 12–17). Such a vivid visual memory tied her closely to the landscape of her home of Cavendish and Prince Edward Island, weighing her down with nostalgic regret that often crossed over into depression. Montgomery's nostalgia for home aligns with Svetlana Boym's view in *The Future of Nostalgia* of nostalgia as a condition of modernity that cannot be cured, as opposed to the seventeenth-century understanding of nostalgia as "a curable disease" (xiv). Boym's description of nostalgia as "a sentiment of loss and displacement" and "a romance with one's own fantasy" (xiii) resonates with Montgomery's longing for a childhood homeplace that has been altered and from which she has been permanently removed. She projects this nostalgia onto characters such as Walter Blythe in *Rainbow Valley* and *Rilla of Ingleside*, whose "prelapsarian" vision of the future, Clement contends, is "an impossible return to an ostensibly happy, never-existent past" ("Heartstopping"), reflective of the questions raised earlier in the sections on "Pathologizing Queerness" and "White Feathers and Shell Shock" about what constitutes mental health and the mental unhealthiness of modern society itself.

Like Wordsworth, Montgomery was tenaciously attached to her birthplace and home, an attachment which only increased after she left to live in Ontario, but, unlike Wordsworth, she was unable to relegate it to the past or to the stage of childhood during which the sensuous experience of home was most vibrant. She was able to successfully capture and convey Wordsworthian "spots of time" in the Wind Woman and the "flash" experienced by Emily in *Emily of New Moon* as demonstrated by Steffler in "Brian O'Connal and Emily Byrd Starr: The Inheritors of Wordsworth's Gentle Breeze" (89–90), but her creative work could not address or heal her melancholic longing for the past and home. Incapable of compartmentalizing emotions associated with remembered experiences, Montgomery tended to both yearn for and be haunted by a past she could not control. Rubio and Waterston speculate that Montgomery's "memory trips were perhaps a curse as well as a blessing" (Introduction, *SJ* 2: xviii). Such a retentive, remarkable, and vivid memory as Montgomery's could not be easily quelled or channelled but tended to control and overwhelm her, causing sorrow, instability, mourning, and depression.

The "aftermath" of war, sudden death, and traumatizing events is tied to a more virulent form of memory than the homesick, nostalgic, and regretful memory. Trauma, as outlined in the CAMH definition quoted above, is "the lasting emotional response" of "living through a distressing event," impacting the survivor "long after the traumatic event occurs." Anne's belief that Walter "could never have lived with his memories" (*BAQ* 510) exemplifies how the human mind can be overpowered by the inability to shed past events and emotions. Excruciating losses and absences, such as the voids left by the deaths of a mother, a baby, a son, result in severe depression as do persistent memories of extreme violence and cruelty. Anne's prolonged illness caused by "grief and shock" following Walter's death in *Rilla of Ingleside* (244) is physical, emotional, and psychological,

leaving her unable to function. Walter's absence haunts the family, the evenings, and the pages of *The Blythes Are Quoted*. The aftermath, or the "after mowing," is neither gentle nor comforting, but recalls the disturbing bayonet "waved … aloft in glee" (*BAQ* 509). Those who have lived through such darkly disturbing events can experience extreme trauma, doomed to remember the events with little possibility of healing or relief as critics of these novels have noted.12

The negative impact of memory on mental health can extend beyond the personal. Montgomery was aware of a memory and a past much larger than those informing her own life. According to Epperly, while Montgomery "was fully experiencing the uncertainty and sometimes agony of current life[,] she was also conscious of a much longer view in which war and loss are mercilessly recurrent" (Introduction, *CJ* 4: vii). This awareness of a "longer view" contextualizes the personal within a much larger and more profound framework of generational, global, and historic memory. The weight of the personal is intensified by the depth and breadth of these more expansive spaces and forces, which can cause inherited and generational trauma, as discussed in the following section.

Less violent and intense catalysts than war, death, and the longer view can also weigh heavily on the mind, causing depression, inertia, and obsessive behaviour. Although time allays and sometimes even heals some of these losses, others remain heavy. Just as the memory of Montgomery's home landscape of Prince Edward Island persists in haunting her through its absence and loss, so too do memories of subsequent homes, Leaskdale and Norval, darken Montgomery's mind and spirit with feelings much more intense than the expected regret and nostalgia caused by the move from one house and region to another. As the years progress, the memory of the past in general becomes more of a weight and a loss for Montgomery, undermining her mental well-being. Montgomery's fictional characters embrace change much more easily than their creator. For example, although Anne is reluctant to leave the "House of Dreams," she settles into Ingleside with relative ease. Even Emily, who is faced with dark memories and attachments to the past similar to those that burden Montgomery, manages to break the cycle that continues to restrict and haunt Montgomery, intensifying her regret and depression. In her chapter in *L.M. Montgomery's Rainbow Valleys: The Ontario Years, 1911–1942*, Clement concludes by pointing out that all of Montgomery's female protagonists, like their creator, respond to the loss of home by building new homes but are much more successful in distancing themselves from the painful memories of their original families, houses, and landscapes ("Toronto's" 260).

Lindsey McMaster's article "The 'Murray Look': Trauma as Family Legacy in L.M. Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon* Trilogy" directly addresses the relationship between memory and mental health. McMaster contrasts Aunt Elizabeth's memory of her father with Emily's memory of hers, arguing that Aunt Elizabeth's inability to love can be traced to the traumatic memories of her father's abuse of authority. In her article "Adolescence and the Trauma of Maternal Inheritance in L.M. Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon*," Kate Lawson also studies the impact of memory and the past, maintaining that "this combat between Aunt Elizabeth and Emily indicates one of the most powerful forces in the novel, the force of inheritance, of personality as determined not by conscious choice but as driven by unconscious patterns of behaviour related to the past rather than to the present." Lawson goes on to argue that "like her Murray foremothers, Emily has a deeply traumatic relation to the place she is in, and to the place she has lost" (29–30). The same can be said of Montgomery. However, unlike Emily, Montgomery is unable to confront and break the cycle.

As discussed in the previous section on the "Aftermath of War," Clark notes in "Creative Vision, Grief, and Memory" that members of the Blythe family respond to Anne's and Walter's poems in *The Blythes Are Quoted* by indulging in memory. Clark further observes that "shared and validated memories become essential to processing the past, coping with loss, and re-envisioning a changed future" and that "Anne writes and reads poetry as a way to remember, not forget." Like Anne, Montgomery is drawn to remembering rather than forgetting. Both author and character stand in opposition to Dr. Blythe's assertion that "people do forget because

they have to. The world couldn't go on if they didn't" (*BAQ* 93). Despite Jem's reinforcement of this belief—"Who was it said, 'We forget because we must'? He was right" (*BAQ* 510)—Anne and Montgomery, like Walter, retain a powerfully intimate relationship with memory and the past based on a drive or compulsion to remember and a reluctance or inability to let go, displaying a temperament and approach that tend to destabilize their mental health. As also discussed in the above section on "The Aftermath of War," Erdmann builds on the point that Jem advocates forgetting as a strategy for psychological survival, whereas Walter sees such forgetting as impossible for those who are forced to live with the trauma of their memories: "*The Blythes* offers a complex vision of forgetting which is simultaneously an impossibility, a willful act of self-defence, and a natural process of silting up the streams of remembrances." For this reason, Erdmann maintains, *The Blythes* is "deeply engaged with the ways in which the past is never truly past and memories persist within individuals and the families they inhabit," an example of the kind of inherited, generational trauma whose cycle they fail to break.

d. Inherited and Generational Trauma: Breaking the Cycle

> I have a very uncomfortable blend in my make-up—the passionate Montgomery blood and the Puritan Macneill conscience. Neither is strong enough wholly to control the other.
>
> —Montgomery, *CJ* 1 (8 Apr. 1898): 401

Montgomery was acutely aware of the contradictory temperaments she inherited from her ancestors through the Montgomery and Macneill bloodlines, which, like memory, were responsible for destabilizing her mental health on many occasions. Rubio and Waterston note that "these uneasy opposites are evident in her journals, as well as in her novels, where there is constant tension between the restraint of age and the energy of youth, between the strictures of proper social customs and human spontaneity" (Introduction, *SJ* 1: xix). More concerning to Montgomery than the contradictions within her own temperament, however, were the serious traumas that could potentially be passed on to her sons, Chester and Stuart, through her family genetics as well as those of her husband. The emergence of Ewen's mental illness or "religious melancholia" in Leaskdale began a nightmarish disruption of Montgomery's life as she confronted what she saw as an existence contaminated by Ewen's fixation on the darkness of a Presbyterianism built on a belief in damnation and hell. Her journal entry of 1 September 1919 records the horrific realization that she had married "a man who was subject to recurrent constitutional melancholia" and that Chester and Stuart "might inherit the taint" (*CJ* 4: 149). Her extensive discussion of Ewen's illness in this journal entry marks a rupture between the life lived before her realization of the extent and nature of Ewen's mental illness and the life lived after her acknowledgement of its presence and impact. Worries about the inheritance of familial trauma and illness based in the darkness of religious thought and practice haunted Montgomery and found expression in both her journals and her fiction.

Montgomery's intimate knowledge of what constitutes "religious melancholia" is apparent in her recognition that the feeling of being "*eternally lost*" or damned is "*the* symptom" of the disease. Her confident proclamation in this September 1919 journal entry that her husband "had every symptom given in the encyclopedia on that type of insanity" (*CJ* 4: 148–49; emphasis in original) suggests that Ewen's breakdown was anticipated and dreaded by Montgomery, who disturbingly on some level had been preparing herself for such a turn through her research in medical volumes and her lifelong interest in the relationship between religion and mental health, particularly inherited mental predispositions. In line with common beliefs of the time, as introduced earlier, Montgomery saw the breakdown in Ewen's mind as being closely related to his physical weaknesses and ailments and as an inheritance he could not escape. Her view of his religious melancholia was not unlike her

view of Isobel Anderson's lesbianism. Just as she saw Isobel as having been "born under [a] curse as another girl might have been born cross-eyed or mentally deficient" (*CJ* 7 [1 Mar. 1930]: 10), so she saw Ewen as having been born and bred under the curse of the Scottish Presbyterian doctrine of predestination.

The darkness of religion and its association with depression repeatedly appear in Montgomery's journals and increasingly in her fiction. In his article "The Religious Thought of L.M. Montgomery," Gavin White discusses Montgomery's struggle with the doctrine of predestination, her rejection of its limitations, and then how she eventually falls into its hopeless darkness in the early 1920s (84–88). Fiamengo notes how Montgomery used religious diction to describe depression and repeatedly "psychologized hell to emphasize her possession by darkness" (178). In her discussion of *Emily of New Moon* in *Magic Island*, Waterston outlines the childhood incident of forced prayer imposed on Montgomery by her grandmother, resulting in lifelong and relived feelings of shame, humiliation, and disgust for certain forms of prayer and religion (113–14). Steffler connects the inherited trauma of that incident with Montgomery's experience as a Presbyterian minister's wife in Leaskdale, where she suffered from shock and a deep abhorrence of the debilitating mental illness Ewen's theological beliefs inflicted on him. Steffler also notes that Montgomery struggled more generally with the doctrine and the institution of the Presbyterian church during the Leaskdale years, causing her physical and emotional distress and taking a toll on her own mental health along with her husband's ("Being").

The connection between religion and the darkness of shame and disgust is perhaps at its most intense in *Emily Climbs* when Emily is locked in the church with "Mad Mr. Morrison." Upon escaping into the uncanny presence of Teddy, Emily recounts how others credit her with "second sight" and "psychic" abilities (60). Such gifts are far removed from the dark, oppressive, and familial Presbyterianism practised by Archibald, passed down to Aunt Elizabeth, and inherited by Emily. Emily's psychic gifts manage to break the cycle of religious trauma. Her delirium, for example, which leads to the discovery of the fate of Ilse's mother, is taken seriously by Aunt Elizabeth. Steffler argues that this event opens Aunt Elizabeth to the possibilities offered by the spiritual realm and "second sight," areas and approaches at odds with the Presbyterianism and orthodox Christianity that had controlled this family for generations ("Being"). This rich area of how conflicting spiritual beliefs impact mental health is one yet to be fully explored by critics of Montgomery's work.

Such a conflict is obvious in the relationship between Emily and Aunt Elizabeth and is based in their differing religious views of the world as inherited by their fathers. Along with qualities inherited from the Starr family, Emily's temperament includes the challenging "Murray look," which confronts rather than perpetuates the dark oppression that Elizabeth inherits and practises. In "Growing Up in Nature: Health and Adolescent Dance in L.M. Montgomery's *Emily* Series," Jenn Macquarrie argues that "Emily is in good health because of her courage and determination not to be afraid of her relatives, unlike her mother before her" (48). McMaster claims that Montgomery "allows her writer-heroine to confront and ultimately to make peace with the madwoman figure [Aunt Elizabeth], 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" ("Murray Look" 62). McMaster emphasizes that Emily's ability to break the cycle of inherited trauma is based in her courage and driven by the determination embodied in her writerly vocation and talents.

Discipline inflicted on Emily, which involves the imposition of sin and guilt, often includes a forced positioning or imprisonment of the body in a manner reminiscent of the punishment imposed on the young Montgomery by her grandmother. In her discussion of Montgomery's journal entry about Bliss Carman and Mary Perry King's *Making of Personality*, Macquarrie highlights Montgomery's endorsement of the "tri-une cultivation of soul, mind, and body" (*CJ* 2 [20 Feb. 1909]: 215) and her opposition to the way in which Christianity devalues the body as an entity to be mortified (45–46). Montgomery's girlhood body was shamed by the dark version of Christianity her grandmother practised. Such mortification of the body darkened Montgomery's mind and spirit

at the time of the punishment and persisted in traumatizing her and adversely affecting her mental health as she relived and rewrote that moment in the years that followed.

In their introduction to the recent collection of essays *L.M. Montgomery's* Emily of New Moon: *A Children's Classic at 100*, editors Yan Du and Joe Sutliff Sanders identify Montgomery "as a professional writer who emerged from familial trauma and a deeply damaged father-daughter relationship" (4). They argue that writing Emily provided an opportunity for Montgomery to renegotiate and revise her own past. In "Emily's Afterlives: Trauma, Repetition and (Re)Reading in *Emily of New Moon* and *Russian Doll*," the final chapter of Du and Sanders's collection, Anastasia Ulanowicz discusses Emily as "largely a narrative about the inheritance of family trauma" (207). She points out how the Netflix series *Russian Doll* builds on the "themes of intergenerational trauma implicit within *Emily*" (209) to the extent that viewers of *Russian Doll* may return to *Emily* paying "particular attention to its similar themes of the repression and gradual working through of intergenerational trauma" (212) in a way they did not notice in previous readings of the novels.

Slater's chapter in Du and Sanders's collection refers to "the unhappy weight of ancestry" (144) and highlights "the profound connection between Emily and Aunt Elizabeth, already queer kin in their shared affinity for the past" (152). Slater builds on previous essays by Lorna Drew, Lawson, and McMaster, which focus on the Gothic and gender. In "The Emily Connection: Ann Radcliffe, L.M. Montgomery and 'The Female Gothic,'" Drew argues that the Gothic genre critiques and collapses the values and structure of the family (20), challenging restrictions that have adversely affected women's mental health for generations. Lawson proposes in "Adolescence and the Trauma of Maternal Inheritance in L.M. Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon*" that "unconscious patterns of behaviour related to the past" result in both Elizabeth and Emily "inherit[ing] an inter-generational family drama" linking "present fears, angers and obsessions firmly to the past" (29). McMaster's argument in "The 'Murray Look': Trauma as Family Legacy in L.M. Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon* Trilogy" suggests that males are the source of the female rage identified by Lawson and that the patriarchy persists. Reading the gendered conflict of generations as a trauma narrative in which unresolved and intrusive past abuse is repeated, McMaster sees Emily's writing as a way to escape past trauma and thus break the cycle of familial and transgenerational oppression.

3. Therapies and Healing Practices

> … it is a nice thing to feel a dainty little cat jump up on your bed in the dark and snuggle down beside you, purring. … I am finding much pleasure writing my new book *The Blue Castle* and getting ready to write Emily III. All these things help. But sometimes it seems to me as if my life now were little else than a search for anodynes. There is always some gnawing mental pain or anxiety to be temporarily obliterated by an opiate.
>
> —Montgomery, *CJ* 5 (27 Nov. 1924): 301

This section of revisiting Montgomery scholarship on mental health looks at various ways that destabilizing mental conditions, whatever the source and intensity, were addressed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston, editors of Montgomery's journals, observe that these journals are "an important document on mental illness, in a period when no effective treatment was known and when the prescribed medications often made things worse through rebounding or other side effects" (Introduction, *SJ* 5: xiii). This section begins with conventional practices related to medication and lifestyle, how they were changing, and how they affected Montgomery's life and writing: drugs and rest cures. However, it is the less conventional practices not generally considered through a therapeutic lens that have recently dominated

Montgomery scholarship, including the eight pieces in the *JLMMS* Mental Health collection: creative pursuits and reading, nature and religion, and a sense of self-worth and meaningful connection.

a. Drugs: Tonics or Toxins?

Jean Mitchell remarks that for two-and-a-half decades post First World War, when Montgomery faced "ongoing pressures" as wife, mother, writer, community member, neighbour, and friend, "[t]he joy of companionship and the vibrancy of relationships were increasingly replaced by medicalization" (125). For an in-depth analysis of the prescription drugs on which Montgomery and her husband, Ewen Macdonald, became dependent over time, Mary Rubio's biography *The Gift of Wings* remains the definitive resource. Drawing on journal entries and contextualizing historically, Rubio traces how this dependency began with Ewen's being prescribed sedatives in 1919 to treat his depression, which Montgomery labelled "melancholia," and Montgomery's increasing use of both poisonous bromides and addictive barbiturates from the 1920s until her death in 1942. Rubio also considers the effects from erratic behaviour to hallucinatory dreams that the potentially fatal mixture of bromides, barbiturates, and medicinal alcohol (brandy and wine) had on their life.13

Further Considerations of Montgomery's Drug Dependency:

Jen MacLennan and Stef Drummond, "I Felt Like That Fly"

Alanna Mitchell, "L.M. Montgomery's Agonizing Drug Addiction"

Jean Mitchell, "L.M. Montgomery's Neurasthenia"

The most fraught controversy related to Montgomery's drug dependency, what today from a mental-health perspective would be considered addiction, relates to how it contributed to her death and whether the drug overdose from which she very likely died was "intentional or inadvertent." Dr. Richard Lane, a neighbour living across the street from the Riverside Drive home in Toronto and the family's physician, listed the cause of her death on the death certificate as "coronary thrombosis." Rubio documents, however, that based on a note found on Montgomery's night table, both Lane and Montgomery's son Stuart, by then a young doctor, believed her death to have been a suicide. Rubio argues Lane "did not tick the box that listed suicide as a possible cause of death" for two main reasons: Lane would not have wanted to implicate himself in a death from "a drug overdose under his watch," and he did not want to damage Stuart's "medical career … if people thought his famous mother had committed suicide—suicide then brought a terrible stigma to the family" (*Lucy Maud* 453, 575).

While Rubio and others have published articles that provide a different explanation for what Stuart believed until his death to have been a suicide note, suicide still cannot be ruled out, supported by the suicidal ideation that Montgomery records in journal entries throughout her adult life and that she uncharacteristically projects onto the most autobiographical of her characters, Emily Byrd Starr. The most significant of these journal entries is the final one in her handwritten journal and published in *Selected Journals* from 23 March 1942: "My mind is gone—everything in the world I lived for has gone—the world has gone mad. I shall be driven to end my life" (*SJ* 5: 350). As well, there is the supposed suicide note, dated 22 April, two days before she died, which Rubio and others now believe would have been a final journal entry:

> This copy is unfinished and never will be. It is in a terrible state because I made it when I had begun to suffer my terrible breakdown of 1940. It must end here. If any publishers wish to publish extracts from it under the terms of my will they must stop here. The tenth volume can never be copied and must not be made public during my lifetime. Parts of it are too terrible and would hurt people. I have lost my mind by spells and I do not dare to think what I may do in those spells. May God forgive me and I hope everyone else will forgive me even if they cannot understand. My position is too awful to endure and nobody realizes it. What an end to a life in which I tried always to do my best in spite of many mistakes. (Rubio, *Lucy Maud* 575–76)

Further Reading on the Cause of Montgomery's Death:

Vanessa Brown and Benjamin Lefebvre, "Archival Adventures with L.M. Montgomery; or, 'As Long as the Leaves Hold Together'"

Mary Henley Rubio, "Uncertainties Surrounding the Death of L.M. Montgomery"

See also https://lmmonline.org/?s=suicide

Unlike observations about her mental state discussed earlier in which Montgomery ascribed her unwellness to an affliction of nerves, body, soul, and/or spirit, here she clearly ascribes her malady to a breakdown of the mind. With the mind broken, she no longer had the capacity to confront a world "gone mad," a world now narrowed into her own unstable, distressed mind.

Rubio borrows the title for her biography from Montgomery's journal entry for 31 January 1920, which begins with Montgomery describing a "power of mine … that has saved me many times in my life from absolute break-down" by escaping from "'intolerable reality'" through imagination (*CJ* 4: 236–37). This long journal entry then reviews inspirational quotations from authors she has read that she keeps in her "old blank book" (237 ff), at one point interjecting with a gloss on a passage she has just quoted from Ouida: "One cannot have imagination and the gift of wings, along with the placidity and contentment of those who creep on the earth's solid surface and never open their eyes on aught but material things. But the gift of wings is better than placidity and contentment after all" (240). Rubio concludes that by the time Montgomery moved to Toronto in 1935, she knew

> … that her mind was its own place, and as John Milton had put it, it could "make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven." Her extraordinary memory, her heightened sensitivity to the emotions that washed over her, her clairvoyant vision into the heart of human muddle—these gifts could paralyze her in the process of living, but they could also inspire and release her into creative work, giving her the "gift of wings." She could see what was happening to herself emotionally, but she was less able to cope with her mood fluctuations as she aged. (467)

Medications and addiction have no place in Montgomery's fiction. Despite those periods when Montgomery's mind inhabited Hell, her legacy is one that has "anchored" her readers in "joyous spots of time" (Rubio, *Lucy Maud* 579), and while she can humorously record Anne's "depths of despair" (Montgomery, *AGG* 31–32) and more seriously Emily's "great weariness" when death "seemed a friend" (Montgomery, *EQ* 208),[14] her works always highlight and return to the healing power of therapies, both conventional and unconventional. In essence,

her writings profile not what fails to heal but what heals.

b. Lifestyle Practices: Rest Cures in Bed or the Wilds

> Ewan is much concerned over my condition and has insisted that I do no writing for a month. I have yielded to please him but I do not think it is a wise thing after all. When I am writing I am happy for I forget all worries and cares. If I do not write I have all the more time for morbid brooding.
>
> —Montgomery *CJ* 2 (10 Nov. 1908): 203

Along with medication, the other accepted practice for treating nervous disorders was based on the "rest cure" of Silas Weir Mitchell (1829–1914), perhaps best known for the devastating effects that it had in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892). Jean Mitchell's "Neurasthenia" essay discusses how Silas Mitchell's therapeutical approach "included rest cure, dietary changes, recuperation at the seaside or a sanatorium, massage, and the cessation of mental stimulation." Originally formulated for men, Silas Mitchell's bed rest "was soon exclusively allocated for the treatment of women" (122).15Throughout the journals, we see Montgomery undergoing variations on the rest cure from bed rest to wilderness therapies. In the above header, she questions the efficacy of the rest cure prescribed by Ewen, her then fiancé, that would cut her off from her creative pursuits several months after the publication of *Anne of Green Gables* when she was preparing another manuscript contracted by her Boston publisher, L.C. Page. By 1942, however, rest cures of one kind or another had become part of her life, whether doctor-, family-, or self-prescribed. Rubio suggests the possibility that Montgomery "retire[d] to her room on April 24 to take a modified and private rest cure" the day that she died (*Lucy Maud* 578). By this point, nothing could "cure" her troubled mind.16

How bed rest affects Montgomery's adult female characters in times of anxiety, grief, or debilitating loneliness—Anne's loss of her first child in *Anne's House of Dreams*, the Blythe family's sending sons and brothers off to war and Walter's death in *Rilla of Ingleside*, or Emily's despondency over her situation in *Emily's Quest*, for examples—remains unexplored in Montgomery scholarship.17 However, *The Blue Castle*'s Valancy has received some attention within different contexts. The two main sources for examination of the inclusion of rest cures in *The Blue Castle*—Kate Lawson's 2007 article "The Victorian Sickroom" and Holly Pike's 2018 article "Propriety and the Proprietary"—do so in the context of both indoor bed rest and outdoor wilderness therapies, respectively. Neither article distinguishes between therapies for the mind versus those for the body nor between mental healing and physical healing, understandably since *The Blue Castle* does not make these distinctions. Lawson contends that Valancy is successful in the "challenge … to make the sickroom a 'Victorian' one, to explore the idealist possibilities for transformation, power, pleasure, and selfhood that the sickroom offers" (238), its recuperative powers for health generally.18

Pike focuses on the rest cures that the Muskoka tourist industry was commodifying in the early decades of the twentieth century. She opens her essay by pointing out that "the recuperative effect of nature" is usually thought of romantically, "as occurring through the unmediated contact with nature portrayed by Romantic poets and essays," discussed more fully when nature as therapy is considered below, but that *The Blue Castle* also depicts recuperation "prosaically as the source of freedom, health, and happiness in contrast to social systems in which individuals are constrained by rules and governed by marketplace interactions. In these social systems, well-being is replaced by the treatment of disease, nature by domestic organization, and happiness by a sense of propriety" (187). Setting social norms against Valancy's subversive behaviour allows Pike to consider how, for the extended Stirling family, Valancy's actions are thought to be "'dippy,' 'stark mad,' and 'maniac.' … [O]nly

mental illness could account for a desire to behave outside of their norms, and the manifestation of such a desire in action would be equivalent to a physical illness" (Montgomery, *BC* 143, 138, 95; Pike 189). It also allows her to focus on the nature of Valancy's disease—pseudo-angina—and the medical "identification of neurosis as the cause of pseudo-angina," that "connects the disease to the types of illness for which a trip to Muskoka is supposed to be a cure," as promoted by various tourism materials and, more generally, "the rise of wilderness tourism" in response to the concern with rising instances of neurasthenia (192–93). Pike notes "the improvement in [Valancy's] living conditions—meals according to her own tastes, fresh air, vigorous exercise, and mental stimulation—exactly the commodities that Muskoka is supposed to provide visitors" (198). These are all elements of the "cure" that Pike discusses with reference to Valancy and Barney's shaping their home as one in which eating and sleeping occur both outdoors and indoors, therefore "making their domestic space a composite of nature and culture" (196).

c. Creativity: A Room and Pen of One's Own

> It is just after dark; the shadows have gathered thickly over the old white hills and around the old quiet trees. The last red stains of the lingering sunset have faded out of the west and the dull gray clouds have settled down over the horizon again. All is very still and quiet here in the old kitchen and so, with much shrinking and reluctance—for a faithful record of my life during the past half year will be, I fear me, but sorry writing—I have brought out this book and set myself down this dull, chilly spring evening to write out the life—the stormy, passion-wrung life—that has been mine these past months. I am going to write it out fully and completely, even if every word cuts me to the heart. I have always found that the writing out of a pain makes it at least bearable.
>
> —Montgomery, *CJ* 1 (8 Apr. 1898): 388–89

Valancy's "domestic space" is reminiscent of Emily's "room of her own" with its window opening to the farm, landscapes, and world beyond that becomes by the end of the third book in the trilogy her space for the creative pursuits that are essential for her mental health in adulthood and healing from childhood traumas. Montgomery gifts Emily the kind of domestic retreat that she herself never had. Buss concludes that the "emotional and physical exhaustion and the other symptoms [Montgomery] exhibited" cannot be read through a Freudian lens but rather "were the result of her never having been allowed a place of her own, literally and figuratively, as woman or as artist, in which she could have fully developed herself. Her inability to voice herself, and thus her possession 'by a fury of restlessness,' seems to me an artist's reaction to all the silencing mechanisms of the familial and societal world in which she lived" (167–68).19 When the weather forbade the kind of "rambles" that Sarah Conrad Gothie describes in her essay in the *JLMMS* Mental Health collection, discussed more fully below, as one of Montgomery's "intuitive wellness strategies" "to de-escalate depressive episodes," Montgomery's only retreat was into her own mind with its "morbid brooding."

Even without a dedicated space carved out for pursuing creative endeavours, however, Montgomery and her artist figures find the means to channel potentially debilitating emotions and responses to suffocating situations into creative pursuits. As already seen, and as she herself notes in the 8 April 1898 journal entry quoted in the above header, as with Emily, expunging pain through writing was integral to Montgomery's creative process. She wrote this long entry just after her grandfather's death and her return to Cavendish, and as this entry continues, she rejects the "rest" that death offers and commits her life to caring for her grandmother: "I must stop this wild wondering—the echo of my confused, troubled thoughts—and begin my story—pick up the dropped threads and go on with it—this miserable life story of mine that can never have a happy ending" (*CJ* 1: 391). By recording and shaping her story in her journals and fictionalizing it through Emily and, to a lesser extent, other artist figures, writing became one of Montgomery's main therapeutic mechanisms for both herself and her

characters.

Melanie Fishbane demonstrates the therapeutic value of writing in her essay "'My Pen Shall Heal, Not Hurt': Writing as Therapy in *Rilla of Ingleside* and *The Blythes Are Quoted*," whose title quotes a sentence from Emily's journals in *Emily Climbs* (25). Fishbane addresses the questions, "Did Montgomery's periods of depression affect her creative impulse? What does her creative process reveal about her psychological health? How did writing help her balance her hypersensitive, moody, and brooding nature with the discipline, self-control, and dignity" required in other facets of her life? (133). To answer these questions, Fishbane examines "how Montgomery uses her characters to question public and private forms of grieving and how the act of writing and reading or hearing words is part of her characters' mourning process" (134) in the two works that her title references. She discusses the toll that Montgomery's ill health, physical and mental, had on her creativity and the toll that the loss of creative pursuits had on her mind later in life.

Fishbane's article investigates the intersection of writing and reading (or listening to words) as does Bella Sagi's "Self-Bibliotherapy: Writing and Identity Consolidation Processes in 'Emily of New Moon' by Lucy Maud Montgomery." By "self-bibliotherapy," Sagi means therapeutic acts of writing and reading undertaken without professional guidance or assistance and, for Emily, undertaken unconsciously. She discusses the young protagonist experiencing healing in different ways when Emily is "writing in times of distress and to regulate feelings, writing in a process of bereavement for the loss of her father and as a way of maintaining contact with him, writing in the face of existential loneliness, and … writing to connect with the loss of her mother and with her true self, thus serving as a real source of salvation from a false and inauthentic life" (164). Sagi charts Emily's "post-traumatic growth" through her writing in "Emily's coming of age journey" (170).

While there are other kinds of art therapies than writing—painting, sculpting, drawing, composing and/or playing music—these are not present in Montgomery's life or fictional writing, unless Teddy's channelling his feelings of unrequited love for Emily through his fixation on her image in his portraits of her might be considered an informal kind of art therapy. One other art form is discussed, although not strictly in its therapeutic sense, in Macquarrie's "Growing Up in Nature: Health and Adolescent Dance in L.M. Montgomery's Emily Series" mentioned above. Like Gammel's article that situates her discussion in the concepts of the health of a nation through its women and like Pike's article that takes a holistic approach, Macquarrie draws on the movement and dance theories and practices of Isadora Duncan to discuss how "[t]he physical, mental, and spiritual health of women could be accessed and strengthened through rejecting the formal hypocrisy of nineteenth-century movement and returning to the creative, instinctive movement of nature" (35). For Emily's narrative to evolve, Macquarrie argues, she "must forge her own healthy community. … The lonely girl embodies Duncan's nature-based dance theories as she turns to nature—and movement within nature—to find both health and companions" (39).

d. Bibliotherapy: Reparative Reading

If at the end of the nineteenth century Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell famously forbade Charlotte Perkins Gilman from reading or writing as part of her treatment for neurasthenia (Gilman 96), today it seems doctors are more likely to prescribe reading as a cure than to censor it. This intentional use of reading for the promotion of mental and emotional health is commonly known as bibliotherapy.

—Jesse Miller, "Medicines of the Soul: Reparative Reading and the History of Bibliotherapy" (17)

In this section, bibliotherapy as experienced by Montgomery the reader, examples of Montgomery's fictional characters benefiting from bibliotherapy, and bibliotherapy as practised by readers of Montgomery's work are discussed. Montgomery's own reading was a form of bibliotherapy. Her journals are filled with references to the titles of books she was reading and rereading along with her thoughts on those books. In his 2004 journal article, "Addicted to Reading: L.M. Montgomery and the Value of Reading," Clarence Karr identifies Montgomery as an example of what he describes as a reading addict and compulsive reader (22–23). He also studies her as a rereader who effortlessly memorizes passages through her highly developed memory. Montgomery explains how when rereading old books "the memories and atmosphere of other readings come back and I am reading old years as well as an old book" (*CJ* 4 [18 Oct. 1921]: 341). This rereading of the past can work as a positive function of memory, soothing and healing life in the present.

In addition to the references to books in her journals, Montgomery's correspondence with George Boyd MacMillan and with Ephraim Weber records her thoughts and ideas about the books she reads. For example, in a letter written to MacMillan on 2 August 1915, she writes the following about *The Alhambra*:

> The special charm must consist in style and subject combined. The one is in perfect harmony with the other. One does not *read* the book; one *lives* it. When I open its covers I always feel a peculiar sensation, as if I had stepped through an enchanted gateway and it had shut behind me, shutting out the real prosaic world and shutting me in "the land where dreams come true." (Montgomery, *My Dear* 75; emphasis in original)

Escapism is not synonymous with bibliotherapy but can play a role in making everyday life more bearable. The test of whether such escapism heals and stabilizes mental well-being occurs when the reader returns to the real world from the imaginary world. There is no question that Montgomery's addictive, compulsive, and repetitive reading served as a form of bibliotherapy through its familiarity and comfort as well as through the entrance it provided into worlds beyond the real one that often challenged her mental health.

Montgomery created characters who practise the type of reading from which she herself benefited. Anne certainly escapes from real-world situations into imaginary worlds through books. Gammel, in her chapter "Reading to Heal: *Anne of Green Gables* as Bibliotherapy," contends that "Montgomery's characters are avid readers" who "[model] the powerfully positive effects of immersive reading" as Montgomery did and that "Anne's modelling of reading as pleasure and empowerment is crucial in inviting readers to do the same." She further argues that Anne's enactment of Tennyson's Elaine uses literature as bibliotherapy in aiding the transition from childhood to adolescence (89, 91).

Anne is not the only character to be moved by the spoken word taken off the page. In Montgomery's final work, *The Blythes are Quoted*, the Blythe household responds to Anne's poetry read aloud in Part One and to Anne's and Walter's poems read aloud and shared in Part Two. In both parts, before and after the First World War respectively, responses to the poems are rooted in memory. In Part One, Gilbert often teases Anne about former love interests suggested in the poems while Anne remembers her past with nostalgia. Reading poetry aloud in Part Two takes on a much darker tone in its almost desperate attempt to bring about individual, familial, and communal healing through bibliotherapy. Most distressing are Gilbert's attempts to talk Anne out of her suffering and mourning and Anne's refusal or inability to forget. The attempt at communal bibliotherapy in *The Blythes Are Quoted* is uncomfortable and tense due to Gilbert's insistence on Anne recovering from a trauma that cannot be healed and that leaves more than a scar. The poems being read are too close to the lives and pasts of the characters to close the wounds and end the grieving.

Other characters in Montgomery's fiction practise reading in ways that provide healing and comfort, but notably through immersing themselves in the writing of others rather than in the writing of themselves or their family.

Such reading distracts the reader from their suffering rather than reminds them of it. For example, in "A Note on John Foster's *Thistle Harvest*," Benjamin Lefebvre comments on how Foster's books through their magic and mystery act as a form of bibliotherapy for Valancy in *The Blue Castle*. Foster's books, Lefebvre believes, "centre her, calm her down, distract her from her problems, and make her feel as one with the world." Lefebvre then introduces a more complex concept of Montgomery rereading and reusing her own work as a form of bibliotherapy. Locating a quotation from Foster's work as originating in a "quartet of nature essays [Montgomery had] published in *The Canadian Magazine* (Toronto) in 1911," as discussed by Epperly in *Through Lover's Lane*, Lefebvre convincingly suggests the following:

> [T]hese essays acted as a bridge between the Montgomery of Lover's Lane and the Montgomery of Ontario who never recovered fully from leaving her beloved Cavendish behind.
>
> In other words, Montgomery's acts of self-repetition don't need to be understood merely as a busy writer taking shortcuts or being strategic, although certainly that can be part of it too. Perhaps these essays became a form of bibliotherapy for Montgomery as well, as she sought to centre herself in the Cavendish woods that she had renamed Lover's Lane and that she could access only in written form while writing in Ontario. To my mind, anyway, the complexity here is worth further consideration.

Such an argument includes Montgomery as both writer and self-reader, creator and nostalgic rewriter, the producer and consumer of bibliotherapeutic writing, thus blurring the somewhat artificial border between reading and writing as distinct forms of bibliotherapy.

As Gammel emphasizes, Montgomery's characters model the positive impacts of immersive reading. The results of such modelling are seen in Catherine Sheldrick's Ross's 1994 essay, "Readers Reading L.M. Montgomery," in which she records readers' reactions to *Anne of Green Gables*. Interestingly, Ross sees the novel as a product of Montgomery's "psychic distress" (23), indirectly alluding to Montgomery's own writing as bibliotherapy. Readers whom Ross contacted definitely assess their reading as forms of bibliotherapy, referring to reading Anne as a comfort, comparable to meeting an old and faithful friend. They talk about the attraction of the old-fashioned and the connection with their grandparents' generation. Ross argues that "readers [of *Anne*] are nurturing their own creativity," reaching back to lost vision and imagination, and that what readers want is an "experience more intense or more real than their everyday life" (33–34). These readers' responses in the early 1990s emphasize how they receive from the novel and the character an intensity that is absent from their own mundane existences and the therapeutic value of being temporarily taken out of these existences.

The results of a later survey conducted by Catherine Ross and Åsa Warnqvist for the 2018 "L.M. Montgomery and Reading" conference gathered responses from Canadian and Swedish readers. Like the earlier responses to the 1994 survey, these comments described reading and rereading as forms of bibliotherapy. Ross and Warnqvist observe that "rereading Montgomery can have a therapeutic function for readers wanting a safe framework within which to make sense of an intense personal experience." According to the comments of readers, they are seeking "recognition and enchantment," "comfort and reassurance," or "hope and a sense of empowerment." Responses emphasized that readers turned to Montgomery during stressful times involving change, transformation, and transition. One reader related how a dying family friend was comforted by her husband's reading the *Anne* books aloud to her, which made her feel calm, relaxed, and safe.

Similarly, Gammel argues that readers return to read *Anne of Green Gables* in times of trauma and transition, facing challenges embedded in the text and anticipating life's losses, particularly death. She suggests that the death of Matthew prepares young readers for the deaths of parents they may face in the course of their lifetime ("Reading to Heal" 96). Steffler's "Anne in a 'Globalized' World: Nation, Nostalgia, and Postcolonial Perspectives of Home" specifies experiences and moments that bring *Anne of Green Gables* into the realm of

bibliotherapy. She relates how a cancer diagnosis immediately brought a woman to *Anne* as a source of comfort and strength (154). She also argues that the contemporary process of "unhoming" in its many forms and repetitions brings readers back to the novel for readings that reinforce the yearning for home in a world that repeatedly destabilizes home, filiation, security, and comfort (160–62).

Anne Stiles argues that readers around the world read Anne as bibliotherapy, particularly during times of upheaval. She cites Poland during the Second World War and postwar Japan as examples (118). Chapters in Jane Ledwell and Jean Mitchell's *Anne Around the World* also explore how the feisty character and the establishment of family and home serve as bibliotherapy for readers in various positions of "unhoming" in other countries. In Iran, for example, Anne is read as a success story, and her stubbornness motivates readers to identify with her and persevere (Samigorganroodi). In "Pilgrimage of Imagination," Sam Roodi, the author of that chapter, turned to poetry to convey the cross-cultural and homing experience of reading Anne:

> Anne's stubbornness, Rumi's wings, Khayyam's joy, Shahrazad's tales
> all converge here,
> in the quiet audacity of reading,
> where literature transcends walls
> and a story becomes a pilgrimage.

It is not surprising that readers and rereaders of Montgomery find the same therapeutic solace in her books that she herself found in her own reading.

e. Nature and Gardens: "A Gift of Healing"

> I have just come in from a walk to Gull Point. … It was almost dark when I left the house and hurried down over the long stretch of gray, marshy fields until at last I reached the point and walked out on its wave-rippled sand to the end.
>
> The scene before me was a witching one. … I came home with a sense of refreshment and encouragement. I needed it, for this has been a dreary week.
>
> —Montgomery, *CJ* 1 (7 Nov. 1896): 334

Nature—that is, the non-human, organic world—was a kind of lifeline for Montgomery, offering her the spiritual, mental, and physical sustenance that sustained her throughout her life. It fed her mind and heart, allowed her to embrace and witness beauty, and confirmed her sense of being part of a more expansive vision of which her immediate encounters with nature provided inspiring glimpses, all essential for her mental well-being. Throughout the many years of her journalling, Montgomery repeated in different ways the kind of therapeutic solace that the natural world offered her. Referring to Lover's Lane as "those divine woodland solitudes," a journal entry of 21 August 1893 reads: "I wish I might go there every day of my life—I always feel better after a stroll under those green arches where nature reveals herself in all her beauty" (*CJ* 1: 165). Three years later, after detailing her evening walk to Gull Point when she was teaching in Belmont, she describes a sea and sky reflecting the intense vitality of nature and, as the quotation in the header shows, notes her renewed inner vitality as well. These early entries reflect an engagement with the natural world that never wanes and, most importantly, that fosters her mental health. More than a decade later, experiencing the dispiriting times of living with her grandmother after her grandfather's death, a walk on "a very mild, still, misty morning, with the smell of spring in the air" makes her feel "the *possibility* of being sometimes glad once more. The ground felt good under my

feet," she continues in her journal entry of 19 May 1908, and "[t]he young spruces along the hill … so green and friendly with pearl-like beads of moisture fringing their needles" lead her to conclude that nature "has always a gift of healing for us when we go humbly to her" (*CJ* 2: 190; emphasis in original).

As her writing life expanded, Montgomery attributed these recognitions of the healing power of nature to her fictional heroines. In *Emily's Quest*, as Emily regains her ability to walk after her fall and injury and begins her emotional recovery, Montgomery has her directly echoing her creator's personal journal in her own entry. With only slight variation, Emily writes in her journal about one of her own morning walks: "It was a very mild, still, misty morning with lovely pearl-grey skies and smell of spring in the air. Every turn and twist on that hill-road was an old friend to me. And everything was so young. April couldn't be old. The young spruces were so green and companionable with pearl-like beads of moisture fringing their needles." And then, like Montgomery, Emily, too, concludes that nature "has always a gift of healing for us if we come humbly to her" (186–87).

Another example of Montgomery's echoes of her own writing that points to nature's capacity for renewal occurs in *The Blue Castle*. In the first part of the novel, Valancy has no contact with nature, but she endures her bleak and hopeless days in her oppressive home environment by reading the philosophy and nature writing of John Foster. In his introduction to Montgomery's series of four nature essays, "Seasons in the Woods," on which, as Epperly points out, Montgomery drew for Foster's writing in *The Blue Castle*, Lefebvre adds further to what he calls Montgomery's "self-repetitions" ("Note"); he identifies "repeated phrases, sentences, and often entire paragraphs with only minor modifications" from these essays "in several of [Montgomery's] later books, … [from] *The Golden Road* (1913) . . . [to] the last novel published during her lifetime *Anne of Ingleside* (1939)" (Introduction 74). While in the "Note," discussed in the previous section on bibliotherapy, Lefebvre concludes that these essays become for Montgomery a form of bibliotherapy helping to bridge the Ontario and Cavendish worlds, they also speak to the benign, palliative influence of the natural world that words and writing can make present as evidenced in Montgomery's writing.

Through a professional forester's lens, James E. Garratt offers another perspective on how the healing powers of nature become part of the lived experience that Montgomery's work presents. In "*Jane of Lantern Hill* and the Montgomery Sugar Maple: An Allegory for Regeneration," he explains that the process of regeneration in forestry terms involves nature's reclamation of wasted sites and the renewal that seeds and their subsequent growths contribute to the life cycle. He acknowledges the difficulty of this process. "Nothing is guaranteed," he points out. In discussing regeneration as a remembering of things lost and the often strenuous striving to recover them, Garratt posits that Montgomery's experiences "in the natural environment of Prince Edward Island, and within her own life" produced her "innate ability to continue forward, as far as possible, with few guarantees." Regeneration is part of the natural world that Montgomery knew so well. Garratt suggests that parallel to but also nurtured by nature, the inner life is rehabilitated by experiencing the natural world. Although he does not call it that, his is an ecocritical recognition in Montgomery, with ecotherapeutic implications, of the intimate and intense relationship between human and non-human organic life as equal participants of their ecosystem. Garratt's perspective is a reminder that non-human organic life also has agency and exerts its reparative, regenerative influence on both human and non-human life forms, an outlook that is evident in Montgomery's writings.

For Montgomery, the influence of non-human organic life, that is, of nature, is benign. Tennyson's "nature red in tooth and claw" (canto 56, l. 15) is not part of her conception of nature. She tended, in a sense, to stylize the darker aspects of nature by turning them into Gothic thrills as when Anne fears walking through her haunted wood. Emily's experience at Wyther Grange has a more serious overtone as her nightly experiences of the moanings of an unknown spectral presence disturb her deeply and provide a kind of counterpoint of fear to the enchanting whispers of the Wind Woman, but the incident still invokes a Gothic tradition, which, as the section on "Inherited and Generational Trauma" points out, both underlines and challenges the restrictions on female

agency that affect mental health. The nineteenth century, however, was also a legacy for Montgomery's belief in the restorative effects of nature through the British Romantic poets and the American Transcendentalists, both of whose works, much admired by Montgomery, speak to the benefits, in different ways, for human and non-human nature to be in dialogue. Gothie's article in this collection makes this point and details how science now supports that Montgomery's nature "rambles" helped sustain her mental health and look forward to forest-bathing therapy.

Whether or not they focus directly on the connections between nature and mental health, most critical approaches to Montgomery's work recognize her belief in the beneficence of the natural world as seen in both her life and work. Epperly writes in *Through Lover's Lane*, for instance, that "Montgomery's Cavendish Lover's Lane became her symbolic gateway for appreciating what she thought of as Nature, an inviolable spirit of beauty that brings, to the fortunate, moments of rapture" (8). In her broader discussion of the "powers of wild consciousness perceived and exercised by crones" (148) in "A Return to the Wild or, Long-Lasting, Mystical 'Lunacy' in *Anne of Green Gables*," Val Czerny points to the capacity of natural elements to act upon and heal human relationships. In the novel's final scenes, Anne, while talking to Marilla, binds the honeysuckle flower into her hair. Under its other name of woodbine, the honeysuckle, Czerny writes, "has been recognized for its healing benefits" that in this scene affect Marilla, prompting her to reveal "to Anne … that she, like Anne, does understand romance." The woodbine's effect, which is "a part of Anne's wild power" (161–62), acts on Marilla to welcome Gilbert into their family unit, strengthening and expanding the kind of life-affirming relationships that bring fulfilment and mental well-being.

Other critical studies see the healing power of nature in Montgomery's work as affecting personal growth and development. These include Catherine Posey's "Ethereal Etchings: Connecting with the Natural World in Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), *Emily of New Moon* (1923), and *The Blue Castle* (1926)." In addition to the association between nature and spirituality that Posey addresses, she engages a pedagogical approach that sees in Montgomery's work a way to encourage environmental consciousness. She suggests that "engaging aesthetically with the earth as a dimension of spirituality can help fuel the desire to protect that earth." The "experience [of] profound natural beauty" is, for Montgomery's heroines, "a moment of transcendence" that leads to a "deeper engagement with the source of that natural beauty, newly discovered personal meaning, or transformation" (97). Posey sees Montgomery's presentation of nature's benign therapeutic influence on her heroines as a holistic process that touches their growth in a range of ways.

In "*Emily's Quest*: L.M. Montgomery's Green Alternative to Despair and War?" Epperly also considers the role that nature plays in the overall mental well-being of Montgomery's heroines as they negotiate their movement into adulthood. She explores how Montgomery points Emily toward "nature's lessons of interdependence and connection" (218) especially through her experiences with the Disappointed House, experiences that help her to embrace the full spectrum of human joy and sorrow. Epperly draws on "synaesthesia, the involuntary multi-modal response to experience" (215), architectural imagery, and the poetry of Wordsworth in her analysis of nature's beneficent influence on Emily's self-understanding that will ensure her well-being as both woman and artist.

Montgomery's 1926 novel, *The Blue Castle*, unique for its Ontario setting of woods and lakes and for being the only Montgomery novel set entirely outside of her beloved island, is of particular interest for the topic of mental health as several critical studies show. As already suggested above, the novel is also unique in Montgomery having her protagonist, Valancy, initially discover nature's healing powers not through direct contact with the natural world but mediated through the writings of the fictional John Foster, who turns out to be a character in the book. Montgomery's heroines sometimes find their feelings for nature best expressed in the work of poets like Wordsworth. In the previously noted "Propriety and the Proprietary: The Commodification of Health and Nature in *The Blue Castle*," Pike points out that through their "ecstatic responses … to natural scenes," which

sometimes reflect Montgomery's own personal, immediate reactions as recorded in her journals, Montgomery's heroines tend to exemplify the "virtues of direct contact with nature and its powers." She maintains, however, that, in contrast, in *The Blue Castle*, Montgomery acknowledges "that the influences of nature may not be immediately accessible to everyone … [and] allows her heroine to locate nature's power on her own terms" (187–88). Pike points to the novel's emphasis on a "commercial or brand structure to produce health" (192) that includes Dr. Redfern's medications, Foster's books, and the promotion of the Muskoka region as a tourist destination for recuperative healing in nature. Montgomery's own vacation in Bala, as her journal attests, fulfilled the tourist industry's promises. Pike sees that the human forays into nature with its promises of healing are complicated by the broader social context. She recognizes that Valancy's ultimate well-being of both mind and body in living in nature and finding fulfilment with Barney is "purchased" through her actions and experiences. Pike concludes that "direct connection with nature" is not presented "as a birthright of the willing heroine but a commodity that must be purchased" (202). *The Blue Castle* thus shows that access to nature as a therapeutic tool can be unequal.

Ashley N. Reese also addresses a mediated access to nature in "Barney of the Island: Nature and Gender in *The Blue Castle*." Like Pike, Reese affirms that Valancy is an exception among Montgomery's heroines who "are able to foster their own connection to nature, generally through time spent outdoors" (68). In contrast, in *The Blue Castle*, Montgomery positions a feminized Barney as the means of linking Valancy to the natural world that will move her from illness, both physical and mental, to health and fulfilment. Reese contends that Valancy's diagnosis of terminal illness is a "catalyst," but it is "Foster's words" that "mobilize" her (72). In their time together on Mistawis, Barney's "intrinsic knowledge of the natural world … usually given only to Montgomery's heroines" provides Valancy with the means to establish a "further communion with the natural world" (78) whose "influence is central to Valancy's recovery" (72) and ultimately saves her for a fulfilling life (78).

The critical approaches of Epperly, Pike, and Reese all suggest the ways in which Montgomery's relationship to nature does not exclude culture. Built environments, economic trends, the house as home, domesticity and homemaking are extensions of the natural world's influence through the complexities of what wounds and heals in the human experience. Montgomery was not against human intervention into the natural world. The most obvious example, perhaps, is her appreciation of gardens and gardening, which Montgomery references in both her fiction and life-writing. In her commentary on "Gardens and Plants" in the *Annotated Anne*, Margaret Doody notes that "Montgomery passed on her love of gardens to all her heroines. The description of every important house in Montgomery's novels, and in many of her short stories, requires a description of a garden" (434). In discussing the Barry garden, which she sees as representing "Montgomery's ideal," Doody draws attention to "how a balance is kept between wild and tame"; human cultivation/intervention in nature has its place. "All of Montgomery's writing about trees, plants, and flowers," Doody observes, "whether in her published fiction or journals, maintain a balance between art and nature, the wild and the civilized" (436–37). It is this kind of balance that is integral to mental well-being.

Montgomery's gardens affirm her resistance to seeing nature and culture in opposition. Referring to her childhood and her present situation in a 2 January 1905 journal entry, she states outright her dependence on both: "I had besides, then as now, two great refuges and consolations—the world of nature and the world of books. They kept life in my soul; they made me love my home because of my dreams and rambles and the deep joy and delight they gave me—because of the halo they threw over what was otherwise bare and savorless" (*CJ* 2: 119). Not surprisingly, Montgomery sometimes applied gardening metaphors to her writing as she does in her 9 March 1935 journal entry, referring to the initial labour involved in both as "spade work" (*SJ* 4: 356).

Montgomery's response to her gardening in her later years speaks to the depth of her depression. Her early journal entries on gardening express joy and fulfilment. "Such comfort as I get out of it," she declares in a 1

September 1901 journal entry (*CJ* 2: 21); "How I love that bit of a garden," she exclaims on 17 January 1905 (*CJ* 2: 121); "I've been gardening a bit," she confides to the journal in a 19 April 1904 entry, "and nobody can do that and be morbid" (*CJ* 2: 100; emphasis in original). Later in life, the garden becomes a measure of the extent of her unhappiness when she writes on 13 May 1931, "we are putting in the garden now. I compel myself to do it, but all my old joy in it is gone" (*CJ* 7: 136).

While some critical studies have invoked gardens as a productive approach to Montgomery's work, as for example Idette Noomé's "Breaching the *Hortus Conclusus*: L.M. Montgomery's *Una of the Garden* and *Kilmeny of the Orchard*," it is surprising in the context of Montgomery's engagement with the natural world and with gardening that more attention has not been paid to the therapeutic value of gardening in her work.20 Akamatsu's article, as summarized below, in this collection addresses this critical gap in discussing one of the most prominent examples of "garden therapy" in Montgomery's work, Cousin Jimmy's garden in the *Emily* books.

Nature as healer is pervasive in Montgomery criticism involving a wide spectrum of Montgomery's themes and preoccupations. In addition to Gothie's and Akamatsu's contributions to the collection that deal directly with the connection between nature and mental health is Heidi Lawrence's article that approaches *Magic for Marigold* through the new field of ecopsychology and ecotherapy to consider the damage that occurs when a child's connection to nature is disrupted. The subject of the therapeutic aspects of nature in Montgomery's fiction, essays, poetry, and life-writing continues to offer a rich mine for further study.

f. Religion: Embracing the Spiritual

> If I really wanted to pray I'll tell you what I'd do. I'd go out into a great big field all alone or into the deep, deep, woods, and I'd look up into the sky—up—up—up—into that lovely blue sky that looks as if there was no end to its blueness. And then I'd just *feel* a prayer.
>
> —Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* (60)

While nature and books were almost always therapeutic for Montgomery and her characters, religion was less reliable and stable. Religion could provide comfort and inspiration, but it could also be a source of trauma, as discussed above. Nevertheless, Montgomery's tendency to emphasize the healing power of therapies over their detrimental effects is certainly seen in her view of religion. Religion as a source of healing for Anne of Green Gables and for L.M. Montgomery was unorthodox, embedded more in nature, the imagination, and forms of spirituality than in Christian doctrine. In his chapter "From Pagan to Christian: The Symbolic Journey of Anne of Green Gables," John R. Sorfleet outlines the ways in which Anne is formed and healed by her creative and imaginative approach to Christianity and by the influence of like-minded characters in Avonlea, particularly Mrs. Allan. In turn, Anne provides a degree of healing for the village itself, bringing it back to "an awareness of the importance of the spirit behind the letter of its social, educational, and religious institutions and customs" (179). Sorfleet argues that "Anne's original values, based in nature and the imagination, have subsequently been enriched by Christian love and ethics" and her "mental, moral, social, and spiritual growth" has contributed to the healing of Avonlea (182).

In her article "Transfiguring the Divine: L.M. Montgomery's Emily Trilogy and the Quest Towards a Feminine Spirituality," Kathleen Miller points out that both Emily and Montgomery pursue a spirituality that "reinterprets traditional Christianity," healing the spirit through feminized forces of landscape and the imagination (144).

Miller argues that Emily refuses to submit to the patriarchy and that her search for a mother leads to the discovery of a powerful consolation and healing strength in a feminized landscape and female power (149–50). Like Emily, Montgomery depended on spirituality and "flash"-like experiences more than doctrine, but as Miller and Steffler ("Being") argue, she was unable to dismiss the institution of the church and thus suffered from debilitating guilt and depression due to the conflict between her deep spiritual needs and her conventional religious practices. Such a conflict kept her searching for religious beliefs that satisfied her spirituality and addressed her depression.

In describing Frede's death in her journal on 7 February 1919, Montgomery recalls that she reminded Frede how they had promised one another that the first one to die would return to communicate with the one left in the world (*CJ* 4: 102). In a letter to MacMillan on 23 August 1920, Montgomery relates how she looked for a clue that Frede was still with her by posing a question to her cat, Daff, and reading a sign of affirmation in his reaction (Montgomery, *My Dear* 101–02). This type of dependence on the unconventional and the occult was integral to Montgomery's search for comfort and stability in the midst of grief, loneliness, and despair. She gave her character Emily an even stronger version of psychic gifts than she herself possessed—abilities that strengthened Emily's confidence and emotional well-being in the face of a family and society that challenged her beliefs and self-worth, as noted by several critics in Du and Sanders's *L.M. Montgomery's* "Emily of New Moon." (See sidebar.)

Further reading on Emily's psychic abilities and mental well-being in *L.M. Montgomery's* Emily of New Moon: *A Children's Classic at 100*, edited Yan Du and Joe Sutliff Sanders:

Jessica Wen Hui Lim, "Exile and Instrumentality in the *Emily* Books," pp. 46–47

Lindsey McMaster, "'Something Incalculably Precious': Diary Writing in *Emily of New Moon*," pp. 94–95

Rita Bode, "Claiming and Reclaiming the Maternal: Mothering and Mothers in the Emily Books," pp. 140–41

Carol L. Beran, "Encroaching Darkness: L.M. Montgomery's Books About Emily," pp. 182–83

Margaret Steffler, "Reading Emily Out of Time and Place: Breaking Chronology and Space," pp.194–95.

Montgomery's openness to the uncanny, the spiritual, and the occult as ways to soothe and heal her spirit and mind is studied by critics who often connect the journals with the fiction. For example, Stiles begins her chapter on *Anne of Green Gables* by discussing the disclosure of Montgomery's death as a possible suicide and speculates about her depressive tendencies and her use of barbiturates. Stiles wants to "bridge the divide between Montgomery's tragic life and cheerful novel" (118) and does so by arguing that the upbeat and cheerful character of Anne is the result of Montgomery's interest in a newly emerging religious movement, New Thought, which was an "optimistic type of magical thinking" (7). She speculates that *Anne of Green Gables*

could be called a New Thought novel (120) and argues that the impact of New Thought is seen throughout Montgomery's career, particularly in *The Blue Castle*. Stiles explains Montgomery's interest in New Thought as "a coping strategy" for herself and her readers (123) that aligns with her interest in the occult, psychology, transcendentalism, theosophy, and Christian Science, approaches that Montgomery often turned to in times of emotional distress and depression.

In her chapter "The Psychic World of Maud Montgomery," in *The Lucy Maud Montgomery Album*, Alexandra Heilbron discusses Montgomery's encounters with spiritualism, which included table rapping, Ouija boards, and seances as well as prophetic dreams and mysterious voices. Heilbron argues that although Montgomery was skeptical of spiritualism in her own life, she gives her character, Emily, remarkable psychic powers and second sight. The suggestion is that Montgomery imbues her characters with mentally sustaining experiences and beliefs that attracted her, but which she was unable to freely and fully embrace.

Theosophy focused on the value of nature and advocated for positive physical, emotional, and mental health through a recognition of connections between body and mind. In her study of Montgomery's encounters with theosophy, Sylvia Du Vernet defines theosophy as "the Wisdom Religion," dependent on "one universal spirit and unity manifesting itself in diversity" and including aspects of Christian Science and transcendentalism (4). Popular during Montgomery's lifetime and directly referred to in *Emily's Quest*,21 theosophy, according to Du Vernet, promoted a "revival of a more open-air approach to spirituality, admitting the significance of individual intuition and imagination" (9), values that were particularly attractive to Montgomery. Du Vernet sees the *Emily* novels as reflecting theosophical beliefs, arguing that the character of Emily, particularly in *Emily's Quest*, experiences mystical encounters of a theosophical nature.

Critical discussions of religion as therapy in Montgomery's life and work tend to emphasize the writer's attraction to the spiritual and the unorthodox in conjunction with her inability and unwillingness to stray too far from conventional Christianity. Fictional characters from Anne to Emily to Valancy are freer to experiment with and indulge in approaches and beliefs that their creator flirted with but to which she was never able to commit. New and experimental spiritual beliefs that challenged conventional Christianity certainly contributed to the positive growth and emotional and mental well-being of many of Montgomery's fictional characters. While such beliefs provided the author with comfort and strength to a certain extent and at certain times, they failed to sustain her in a consistent manner and certainly fell short of providing therapeutic comfort and peace in the final years of her life when, it is noteworthy, she was no longer playing the role of a minister's wife.

g. "Stronger Connections. Better Mental Health"

I became an acolyte of Anne and, through her, of Lucy Maud Montgomery when I read an abridged version of Anne of Green Gables as a child. More than fifty years later, I continue to re-read the series and see Anne through the eyes of a hospital chaplain. Even though Lucy Maud Montgomery struggled with her own mental health in later years, through Anne she created a model of emotional wellness. Anne insists on expressing her vulnerable feelings of sadness, grief, and yearning. She both nurtures loving relationships and cultivates a lush inner life. She seeks out awe in the natural world. As a girl growing up with a mother experiencing mental illness, I found that integrating Anne into my being helped keep me whole. Today, when I support patients, their loved ones, and hospital staff, Anne and Maud still accompany me as guides.

—Lori Klein, "#Maud 150 Tributes: World Mental Health Day"

As the above discussion of "Religion: Embracing the Spiritual" observes, Montgomery's beliefs, conventional and unconventional, sustained her mental well-being only inconsistently and completely failed after her move from Norval to Toronto in 1935. She no longer had a belief system nor a valued place within her community. "The joy of companionship and the vibrancy of relationships," that Jean Mitchell (125) notes, seem to have almost completely disappeared. She could not adjust to her new role of mother to adult children. She could no longer draw on her connectedness to nature, including her love of gardening, to navigate her way through the shadows and find the healing that nature had provided in her Prince Edward Island, Leaskdale, and Norval homes. The cinema screen replaced other sources of cultural connectedness that she previously enjoyed with local community groups, "primarily elocutionary and theatrical performances," a shift that Clement believes "reflect[s] and profile[s] Montgomery's growing consciousness of herself as a consumer product in an illusionary and ultimately unsubstantial world of literary fame." She "turned more and more to the movies as tonic for her sagged soul, as pure escape, … often faulting them for being a travesty of the book or history on which they were based and with which she was intimately familiar" ("Toronto's" 242, 253). But even these books no longer sustained her in the way they once had. It was not simply that she found reading new material a chore, as she writes to MacMillan in 1940 when acknowledging receipt of a parcel of literary magazines that he had sent her: "All the things that once gave me pleasure bring only bitterness to me now. I feel turned into another personality" (Montgomery, *My Dear* 201).22Even more significantly, her relationship with "old books" and her journalling about these books shifted radically, as Emily Woster demonstrates in her essay "Old Years and Old Books: Montgomery's Ontario Reading and Self-Fashioning." Woster's research finds that this "final period … from 1926 to 1942" is haunted by a "homesickness" that is twofold: first, there is the "sense that Montgomery has resigned herself to the failed potential of the new world in which she lives," and second, there is an "awareness of the passing of time and the ways in which her own age serves as a barrier to her former selves" (162–63). She no longer recognizes herself. All forms of connection to spaces of belonging, internal and external, have vanished.

As tragic as these final years were, Montgomery's readership is fortunate that these spaces of belonging—self and self-worth, family, community, nature, books—provided her with the safety and inspiration to produce a substantial and meaningful body of fiction, poetry, and life-writing. Moreover, these spaces of belonging underpin her characters' mental well-being whether "the emotionally starved and psychologically abused Valancy Stirling and Robin and Jane Stuart" or "the recalcitrant Pat" who loses her "home for generations" (Clement, "Toronto's" 260; *MP* 375). The *Anne* and *Emily* novels focus on the complicated process of finding these spaces. Valerie Pilmaier's chapter "'Kindred Spirits': Vulnerability as the Key to Transformative Female Relationships in L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*" draws on "feminist theory, relational-cultural theory, and shame resilience theory" (151) to argue the value of "vulnerability [as] the key to connection with

others" and of "female emotional health" (161). Pilmaier cites, among others, Brené Brown's 2006 article on "Shame Resilience Theory" that "details the relationship among shame, vulnerability, and connection" to establish that connection is a "particularly female need" and that "[c]onnection augers healing" (151). Anne finds some of these therapeutic connections in female communities.

Pilmaier's use of "connection" is the kind of "fitting in" that Clement demonstrates the *Emily* novels question and replace with "true belonging." Rooted in Brown's later work—*Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone* (2017) and *Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience* (2021)—Clement's "Emily Byrd Starr Meets Brené Brown: 'Braving the Wilderness' and Achieving 'True Belonging'" examines the challenges that Emily, Teddy, Perry, and Ilse "undergo as they navigate the social and psychological hurdles of young adulthood," including "shame, humiliation, and fear; authenticity, (im)perfection, and connection; hurt/soul-wounds, vulnerability, and boundaries" (55). It is noteworthy that, unlike Pilmaier's focus on the "emotional currency" in which Anne's world "trades" (154–55), Clement's essay highlights Brown's contention that "[t]rue belonging and self-worth are not goods; we don't negotiate their value with the world. The truth about who we are lives in our hearts (Brown, *Braving* 158)" (63). In so doing, this place of "true belonging" in the *Emily* trilogy, Clement argues, is "a wilderness where inner and outer worlds intersect and often collide" (54) but where Emily reaches an "understanding that freedom is achieved not by isolation and alienation from meaningful connection and interconnectedness but only by risking rejection and hurt" and allowing herself to be vulnerable in celebrating her "shared humanity" in romantic, familial, and communal relationships (64–65).23

Montgomery's inclusion of instances of mental instability and mental health and of therapies and healing practices reflects the changing attitudes of the early decades of the twentieth century. But these instances are often at the very least unconventional and even radical as when she questions the healthiness of a society against which an individual's mental health is being measured or when she suggests that access to resources is not always equitable, points developed above. In 2024 the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) headlined one of its reports with this bold statement: "In Canada, mental health is a privilege. It should be a right" ("The State of Mental Health"). As always, Montgomery looks back through her present to the future, and one staple that always emerges as integral to mental health is a sense of self-worth and meaningful connection. Montgomery was truly a woman of her own time and of our time. The theme for the CMHA's Mental Health Week 2026 is one that Montgomery understood well:

Come Together, Canada

Stronger Connections. Better mental health.

Social connection is essential to overall health and well-being. …

This **May 4-10**, CMHA is inviting people across Canada to **Come Together**.

It's a call to spark small, everyday actions of connection, and to recognize the role we all play in supporting mental health through connection.

Together, we can strengthen mental health, build healthier communities, and help more people feel connected.

Because connection strengthens mental health.

4. Eight Reflections on Montgomery and Mental Health: Montgomery's Legacy

The eight pieces in the *JLMMS* Mental Health collection delve deeply and creatively into many of the topics and subtopics we have discussed relating to gender, sex, and sexuality; loss and trauma; and therapies and healing. Each in a different way celebrates Montgomery's legacy in exploring how a healthy mind flourishes only when embracing and being embraced by "a space of 'true belonging,' a wilderness where inner and outer worlds intersect and often collide" (Clement, "Emily Byrd Starr" 54).

a. Gender and Trauma

Constance M. Ruzich, "'I Smile for His Sake': Unmasking Grief in L.M. Montgomery's 'Our Women'"

Ruzich ends her essay in the *JLMMS* Mental Health collection with the above quotation from Bridget Keown, whose research centres on "the construction of history through trauma" ("Bridget Keown"). Ruzich then comments, "Montgomery's war writings expose the mental trauma that she and many of 'Our Women' experienced during the Great War as a consequence of their struggles against the demands to mask and disguise their personal tragedies." Ruzich's essay focuses on the twelve-line "anti-elegy" "Our Women," which Montgomery published in 1918, and links it to *Rilla of Ingleside* and Montgomery's journal entries during and immediately after the war. Each of the three women in the poem, Ruzich observes, represents a different stance toward war-time loss. The bride dons the "cheerful lie," "[a] cheerful façade … put on like a garment," negotiating social perception of what are acceptable and unacceptable forms of public grieving. The mother, Ruzich continues, is expected to find pride in her loss, the self-sacrifice made in a time when there was an intensified attempt "to harness the political power of the ideals of Mother and Motherhood," specifically "Patriotic Motherhood." And, finally, there is the shame of the woman who has no son to give.

The three women have no community with which to share their grief, a community essential for mental well-being. "Each of the bereaved women portrayed in 'Our Women' is isolated, walled off within her own stanza, set apart from both the grief and the comfort of others. Each speaks to herself in a private monologue of mourning." Although Ruzich suggests that Montgomery, with a husband too old and a son too young to serve, is closest to the third woman, she also develops the idea that Montgomery channelled the grief over the loss of her stillborn child in 1918 through the "disenfranchised grief" seen through the guilt and shame felt by soldiers' mothers, "'trapped,' powerless to affect the course of the war, to resolve their persistent anxiety for the men they loved." Montgomery's legacy is multi-faceted in her ability to understand and convey grief and loss from different perspectives.

Michaela Wipond, "The Deadly Pestilence: Pain and Mourning in L.M. Montgomery's Pandemic Life Writing"

Unsurprisingly, Montgomery's life-writing has received substantial attention, especially because it underpins so much of the loss and trauma found in her poetry and fiction. Two of the essays in the *JLMMS* Mental Health collection focus almost exclusively on this life-writing. The first is Michaela Wipond's essay, which, like Ruzich's, discusses the "unsharability" of women's pain; however, Wipond does so through a different lens than Ruzich, an examination of Montgomery's journal entries and letters from December 1918 to May 1919, which "reveal her psychological shift from the shared anxiety and excitement of the war years to the intensely personal pain and grief of a pandemic."

Wipond begins with a discussion of the journal entries and "pandemic correspondence" with Weber and MacMillan about Montgomery's own experiences with the flu, concluding that "Montgomery's mental health

was more expressible and persistent than her physical symptoms, leading her to privilege the disease's psychological side effects." It was, however, her experiences of loss when the flu took its toll on her Park Corner relatives and then on her cousin and best friend, Frede, that we see Montgomery retrospectively framing her experiences as narratives in an attempt to channel her loss. Wipond draws on Brené Brown, Cathy Caruth, and Sigmund Freud, among others, when examining how "[t]he act of recording trauma narratives has long been a mechanism for coping with grief." Wipond concludes that "[e]xposing her grief in her journal and letters was integral to her work of mourning, but it did not emotionally free her from Frede." For Montgomery, Frede's death would forever be a marker between two worlds, and the present world was one in which she never felt she quite belonged.24 Wipond rounds off her essay by arguing that, although we may wish Montgomery had been able to find the release from grief that she sought, her legacy is keeping Frede and this loss "alive" in her published letters and journals.

The other three scholarly essays in the *JLMMS* Mental Health collection reflect on the therapeutic value of connecting to the natural world; they therefore profile healing over loss.

b. The Therapeutic Value of Rambles, Gardening, and Connecting to Nature

> Ecotherapy, also known as nature therapy or green therapy, involves outdoor activities and exposure to natural environments as a means of promoting psychological healing. This therapeutic approach recognizes the symbiotic relationship between our mental health and the natural world, suggesting that reconnecting with nature can significantly improve our quality of life.
>
> —"Ecotherapy: Nurturing Mental Well-being through Nature"

Sarah Conrad Gothie, "'I Would Rather Lose Everything Else I Possess': Love of Nature and L.M. Montgomery's Intuitive Wellness Strategies, 1901–11"

Gothie's essay, the second to focus almost exclusively on Montgomery's life-writing, looks at "Montgomery's Intuitive Wellness Strategies" in the first decade of the twentieth century, how Montgomery's "rambles" assisted her "to de-escalate depressive episodes and restore her mental wellness," and how they "may have boosted her mental health during a pivotal period in her career, particularly during the winter of 1905 to 1906, when she was composing *Anne of Green Gables*."

Gothie roots her argument in scientific evidence of "the physical and mental health-boosting capacities of forest scents and sunlight, two aspects of nature that Montgomery frequently describes as key features on her walks." She cautions that "[t]his is neither a retroactive attempt to diagnose Montgomery nor a suggestion that nature therapy can function as a panacea for mental illnesses resulting from trauma or genetic predisposition." Gothie recognizes that "[n]ature alone could not fully neutralize the mood swings, isolation, abandonment, grief, poverty, structural and interpersonal sexism, and stunted ambition that Montgomery endured." Instead, Gothie "highlight[s] the role of the outdoors in [Montgomery's] experience of mental illness, specifically her resourcefulness and intuition in seeking relief via nature." While focusing on the life-writing, Gothie also points out how the "healing, liberating, and inspiring influences" of nature manifest themselves in her characters and how both these characters and places associated with Montgomery can provide a legacy for our own well-being: "Montgomery's followers can learn from her successes as well and emulate her ramble therapy to bolster mental

health and immune function, mitigate stress, and rejuvenate the spirit. For those who spend daily labour and leisure time sedentary and gazing at screens, immersion in the sunlight and aromas of non-threatening natural settings is more crucial than ever for physical and mental health."

Yoshiko Akamatsu, "Mental Health and Resilience in the *Emily* Trilogy: Emily Byrd Starr and Cousin Jimmy through the Lens of Garden Therapy"

Akamatsu's contribution to the collection, cited in the opening paragraph of this overview of scholarship on Montgomery and mental health, also situates itself in the relevance to today's world of Montgomery's portrayals of nature's therapeutic value. As with many during the pandemic, Akamatsu observes, in the *Emily* trilogy, "both children and adults struggl[e] with isolation and loneliness, often the consequence of loss." Akamatsu discovers that gardens and gardening have an essential role "in the development of resilience and mental well-being that underpin—and are underpinned by—the creative endeavours of Emily and Cousin Jimmy," a role that aligns with "twenty-first-century concepts of resilience and gardening therapy."

Akamatsu also ties Cousin Jimmy's and Emily's physical engagement with gardening and love of gardens to the creative process previously discussed as instrumental for Montgomery and many of her characters to maintain mental health. She quotes Montgomery's journal entry for 30 March 1927, "I have always had my own ideal world of dream and fancy to roam in—my 'secret garden' where my soul dwells and quenches its thirst at unknown, enchanted springs while my hands are painting floors" (*CJ* 6: 120) and annotates with the observation "[t]he garden here is a metaphor for a place in which she recharges her power of resilience, a safe haven in both the physical and imaginary worlds. Emily, who reflects Montgomery with her inner world, also has two gardens: the New Moon garden and the 'secret garden' within her that sustains her spirit." This too is Montgomery's legacy: author and characters "illumine a path to the recovery of mental well-being and the fostering of resilient powers in oneself."

Heidi M. Lawrence, "'Lost Laughter': Mental Health through Nature Connectedness in *Magic for Marigold*"

Lawrence ascribes a similar legacy to Montgomery in her discussion of how ecocriticism and ecotherapy function in Montgomery's novels. Her essay argues that, for readers, Montgomery's fiction opens up "new perspectives on others both in and out of the book" that invite us "to develop a strong connection to the natural world, which when pursued as a therapeutic modality have demonstrable positive effects on mental health and well-being."

Lawrence draws on ecopsychology and ecotherapy to explore "the importance not only of fantasy and imagination for the human ability to develop health-bringing relationships with the nonhuman but also of nature connectedness as a component of mental health." This importance in *Magic for Marigold* becomes very evident when the child's "relationship with the outdoors is first curtailed and then reinstated by an adult who does not share the same fantastic and highly imaginative capabilities as the child has." Lawrence acknowledges that, although there is no sequel to *Magic for Marigold* to take the child into adulthood and see if and how "her love for the natural environment" continues to be of vital importance, "we do have many other Montgomery novels that follow adolescents and adults through various iterations of growing up to, rather than away from, nature." Anne, Emily, Jane, and Valancy, in particular, provide readers with "examples of (especially) girls, young women, and adult women finding solace and emotional, psychological, and physical health and strength through their love of the natural world."

In the remaining three pieces in the *JLMMS* Mental Health collection, we see the wellness practices of Montgomery's characters in action.

c. Creative Reflections on Montgomery's Legacy

She wrote about that hour out of the past, turning back
to a time when the world seemed safe, before motor cars,
world wars, madness, death. She gave her readers marriage
in the final chapter, the happy-ever-after ending.
She wrote about marriage failures, war, despair, madness,
death. The anger we carry in our bones because life cheats
us, steals what we hold most dear, gives us back our dreams
with tarnished corners. The secrets we never reveal.

—Katherine Cameron, "L.M.M."

Lori Klein, "What Anne Taught Me About Living with Tragedy and Grief"

The abstract for Klein's reflective essay makes clear the impact that Montgomery's legacy had on her, which she now passes on to others through her pastoral work as rabbi and health-care chaplain: "How did Anne's wisdom assist my coping with my mother's mental illness and traumatic death? This essay draws on William Worden's four tasks of mourning and explores Anne's willingness to outwardly express strong emotion in response to death and other losses. Today, Anne's wisdom guides me in my work as a chaplain." Klein acknowledges that Anne has shaped her response to suffering and hardship in different ways at different points in her life. As a child, for example, when her mother "disappeared into depression, … I experienced 'mother loss' both before and after my mother's death, and so likely was drawn to Montgomery's novels because, as Rita Bode writes, '[t]he search for the lost mother, the attempt to locate her emotionally, psychologically, and physically, haunts Montgomery's fiction.'"[25]

While Klein's attention is generally on how the *Anne* books functioned for her as bibliotherapy in coping with her mother's mental illness and suicide—although conceding that "[b]ibliotherapy alone would take me only so far"—she touches on other ways that they helped stabilize her mental well-being through representation "as brainy girl and nascent lesbian beginning to experience romantic crushes. Anne's devotion to academic excellence and romantic friendships with Diana Barry and Leslie Moore validated my life choices. … Like other serial readers of the *Anne* series, 'I wanted to be Anne,'[26]in her insistence on being herself, in her devotion to lifelong female friendship, and in her straining against the gender norms of her day." As with Katherine Cameron quoted above and Jessica Brown quoted above and below, Klein's learning about Montgomery's own sufferings added a new dimension to her understanding and experience of life: "A more pessimistic, sad Montgomery read over my shoulder as I reconnected with Anne's joy-tinged wisdom. Like Montgomery, I see the subtleties in how life unfolds now in a way that was impossible to see in my twenties." Reading—and now writing about her reading— assisted Klein both as a health-care chaplain and as someone, years later, still coping with traumatic loss and, more generally, the hurt that a life deeply lived can inflict: "Healing is an iterative, spiralling process. Through that lifelong process, I will carry Anne with me, whether I know it consciously or not. Looking back at the *Anne* series and its role in the most challenging year of my life has brought me to a new narrative, a deepening peace."

Sameera Chawla, "The Other Sara: A Creative Intervention in *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road*"

Like Montgomery, who was able to capture what others might trivialize and dismiss as "childish" sorrows, Chawla channels the feelings of anxiety, inferiority, difference, despondency, and loneliness of Sara Ray through the eyes of a cat, Paddy. Her short story about the "Other Sara" provides a "redemption" for this often (canonically and critically) overlooked character through nature and prayer, which aligns with the healing power of religion in Montgomery's works by "embracing the spiritual" discussed earlier. For Sara, articulating her sorrow in a written prayer induces a "holy stillness" as her weeping is "hushed in the orchard's embrace." Paddy too participates in this spiritual moment:

> The faint aroma of the White Ladies in Uncle Stephen's Walk crept on us and suffused us with the glamour of the orchard. "They look like the souls of good women who have had to suffer much and have been very patient," the Story Girl had explained when she had named these dainty flowers. They had no name otherwise because they did not grow anywhere else, did not appear in any floral catalogue, and so were quite unknown to the world. But to our little universe, their demure charm made all the difference.

Jessica Brown, "The Wound of Beauty Operates in Otherwise Ways: But for Maud, 18 Ways"

Brown's "kaleidoscopic creative essay," finds not just "demure charm" but "a life-giving amount of shadow, longing, and hunger" in Montgomery's "vision" of her characters' well-being:

> … to drop down into the shadowy affects—melancholy, longing, wistfulness—let me break onto a fern-edged path beside L.M. Montgomery. As a young reader … even before encountering Montgomery's troubled short stories and journal entries—[I found] an undercurrent, a tug, of emotions I didn't know how to name, but that I could feel out as a reader, and that gave me a connection to affects within me that I would not have been able to connect to (to feel) without Maud's help.

For Brown, a poet and novelist, the quintessential Montgomery moment is reflected in Chapter 12 of *Emily Climbs*:

> Emily's night on the haystack shows what we're capable of, our souls, when permeated by the existence of beauty. Light, sorrow, ocean-depths, star-flung traversing, gazing that gazes back into us, swaths of joy that far surpass happiness: a kind of music and also joining the music. This picture of mental health clearly surpasses survival, but it even circumvents that beauteous, enviable rendition of mental health that equals robustness or strength.

Brown's creative essay celebrates not just Emily as aspiring beyond comfort and conventional happiness to the wholeness/holeness/holiness of life at the core of mental health: "Maud's Big Feelers: Anne, Emily, Pat, Sara, Valancy, Jane. They have a kind of throbbing receptivity to them, don't they?" This then is Montgomery's most magnanimous legacy, so well captured in Brown's vision of L.M. Montgomery and Mental Health:

> This wholeness connects to the I-Thou vision of flourishing: Wholeness from a holeness that creates a permeability that might be synonymous with vulnerability that might be synonymous with fragility—but, all in all, is synonymous with blessedness (which, really, is an interactive kind of health) that comes to the thirsty so that the presence of another is an inimitable part of the flourishing equation, and casements we might try to nail closed when in the mood for hunkering down refuse to shut.
>
> —Jessica Brown, "The Wound of Beauty"

Banner image: DrAfter123, istockphoto.com

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- 1 Mitchell cites Eric Caplan, *Mind Games: American Culture and the Birth of Psychotherapy*(U of California P, 1998), p. 45.
- 2 Fiamengo cites Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (Vintage, 1996), p. 176.
- 3 Because of the scholarly nature of our collaborative work, references to our own publications are in third person.
- 4 Robinson's references are to Mary Rubio, "Subverting the Trite: L.M. Montgomery's 'Room of Her Own,'" *Canadian Children's Literature* 65 (1992): 6–39; Elizabeth Rollins Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass: L.M. Montgomery's Heroines and the Pursuit of Romance* (U of Toronto P, 1992); and Shirley Foster and Judy Simons, *What Katy Read: Feminist Re-Readings of Classic Stories for Girls* (U of Iowa P, 1995).

- 5 Clement cites Ahmed 45, 90, 107.
- 6 Edwards argues that "the persecution of Walter before he enlists is very ugly" but that "[a] much sicker symptom surfaces when little Bruce Meredith murders his beloved pet kitten to persuade God to bring Jem back alive. … [Montgomery] shows that with the impact of war, God has been transformed in children's eyes into the Carthaginian Moloch, to whom children were sacrificed for military gain" (Lefebvre, *L.M. Montgomery Reader* 174).
- 7 The references are to Martin Stone, "Shellshock and the Psychologists," *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry*, vol. 2, edited by W.F. Bynum, Roy Porter, and Michael Shepherd (Tavistock Publications, 1985), pp. 245, 248–49, 263, and Mark Humphries, "War's Long Shadow: Masculinity, Medicine, and the Gendered Politics of Trauma, 1914–1939," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 91, no. 3, September, 2010, pp. 506–10, 513–14, 517–18.
- 8 The Gilbert quotation is from "Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War," *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, edited by Margaret Randolph Higonnet, et al. (Yale UP, 1987), p. 198.
- 9 In response to Anne's poem "The Wind" that celebrates the comfort of fireside and hearth, gardens and valleys, in the face of the vicissitudes wrought by the wind, Gilbert says, "That you can write so well shows the wound is healing," to which Anne comments, "But the scar will always be there" (Montgomery, *BAQ* 396–98).
- 10 Janes cites two sources for Caruth: introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Johns Hopkins UP, 1995) and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Johns Hopkins UP, 1996/2016).
- 11 Janes cites Philip D. Beidler, "The Great Party-Crasher: *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Great Gatsby*, and the Cultures of World War I Remembrance," *War, Literature and the Arts*, vol. 25, 2013, pp. 1–23.
- 12 See, for examples, Jones, "The Shadows of War" 176–81; Robinson, "L.M. Montgomery's Great War" 117; McKenzie, "Women at War?" 195–96; Fishbane, 142–44; Lefebvre, "'That Abominable War!'" 118–23.
- 13 Although there are passing references throughout Rubio's biography to their drug dependency and its effects, see in particular, pp. 507–15, 527, 537–38, 545, 565–67, 570.
- 14 For a discussion of Emily's "deathlike reclusivity" at this time in her life, see Clement, "Emily Byrd Starr" 63.
- 15 Rubio makes specific reference to Mitchell's "rest cure" when glossing a comment made during an interview with Eric Gaskell: Montgomery had said when she spoke to him in April 1942 that she was "'depressed,' but hoped to correct this by what she called a 'period of relaxation'" (*Lucy Maud* 571–72, 640n102).
- 16 Anne Stiles writes that "While Montgomery luckily managed to avoid a rest cure, she had plenty of experience with other ineffective treatments for mental illness," such as the drugs she was prescribed (151). Stiles is referring to institutionalized rest cures here rather than bed rest.
- 17 Even an essay such as Susan Meyer's "The Fresh-Air Controversy, Health, and Art in L.M. Montgomery's *Emily* Novels" (Mitchell, *Storm and Dissonance* 209–20) focuses more on physical than psychological health.
- 18 In the second part of her article, Lawson argues that *Emily's Quest* fails to do this, concluding that it is "beset by a deadening heartsickness and painful sense of failure" (245), a conclusion that many recent scholars would contest. See, for examples, Clement, "Emily Byrd Starr" and "Heartstopping Moments"; Epperly, "*Emily's Quest*" (especially pages 219–22, 228–29); and Slater, "A Ghost."
- 19 Buss cites Montgomery's journals, a continuation from the 7 February 1910 entry quoted earlier: "The days were only one degree less hideous than the nights. I could not eat … I could not work or think or read or talk. I was possessed by a very fury of restlessness, only to be endured by walking the floor until my limbs failed from very exhaustion" (*CJ* 2: 281).

- 20 The 2027 LMMI Virtual Roundtable, being organized by Abby Chandler, is on “LMM and Gardening.” The roster of speakers will be announced in the 2026 LMMI International Conference program.
- 21 When Emily goes out with Rod Dunbar, the religious affiliations of the family are probed and viewed with horror by the New Moon elders, who note that one of the sisters was a Christian Scientist and “[t]he other sister was a Theosophist, which was worse than all the rest because they had no idea what it was” (*EQ* 153; emphasis in original).
- 22 Similarly, she writes to Weber the following year, thanking him for a book he has sent: “I will read it if I ever am able to read again” (*After Green Gables* 263).
- 23 In the later article on “Heartstopping Moments,” Clement argues that, unlike in the *Anne* books, the “interconnectedness” the *Emily* trilogy posits extends beyond “shared humanity”: “Happiness for the Blythe and Meredith families settles into satisfied complacency, one generation begetting the next, a protective fitting-in rather than true belonging. In the Emily trilogy, bends are replaced by panoramic—even galactic and intergalactic—vistas … Queer joy lays down desire lines that intersect and skew horizontal horizons and create multiversal spaces, new possibility models, that value the diversity of a shared humanity and respect for the non-human world.”
- 24 See Montgomery, *CJ* 4 (7 Feb. 1919): 122–23.
- 25 Klein quotes Bode, “L.M. Montgomery and the Anguish of Mother Loss” 55.
- 26 Klein quotes Ross and Warnqvist, “Reading L.M. Montgomery.”

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