Reading Time: L.M. Montgomery and the “Alembic of Fiction”

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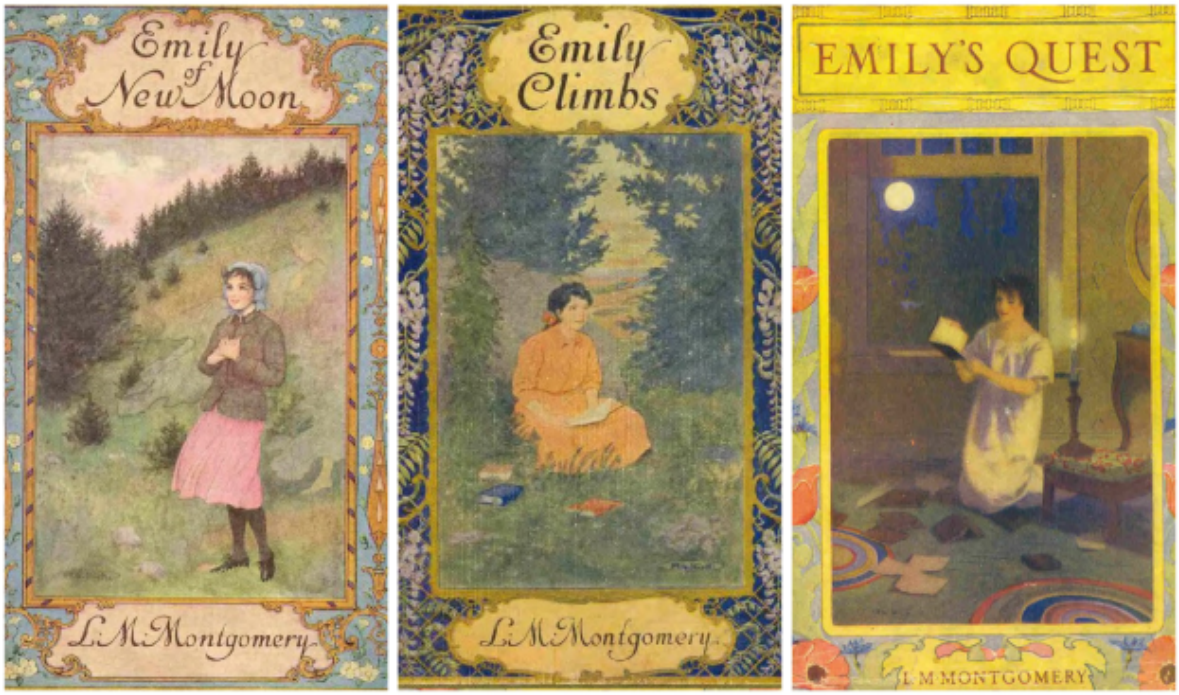
In my title I borrow the phrase the “alembic of fiction” from Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston. When I read this phrase in their introduction to the fifth volume of the *Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery* in 2004,[1] I did not know what an “alembic” was—and when I looked it up and found out it meant, literally, an apparatus for distilling and thus transforming one substance into another and, metaphorically, a transformative process, I thought and think it a brilliant way to characterize what many of us find so persuasive in Montgomery’s writing: the distillation and re-creation of real-world, personal tensions in an inspiring fictional form. The first two words of my title, “reading time,” are meant to be read in two ways: *reading* time, with the emphasis on the activity of reading, and reading *time* with the emphasis on what “time” can mean. Thus, I am talking about the potentially transformative power of reading Montgomery’s fictional treatment of time.

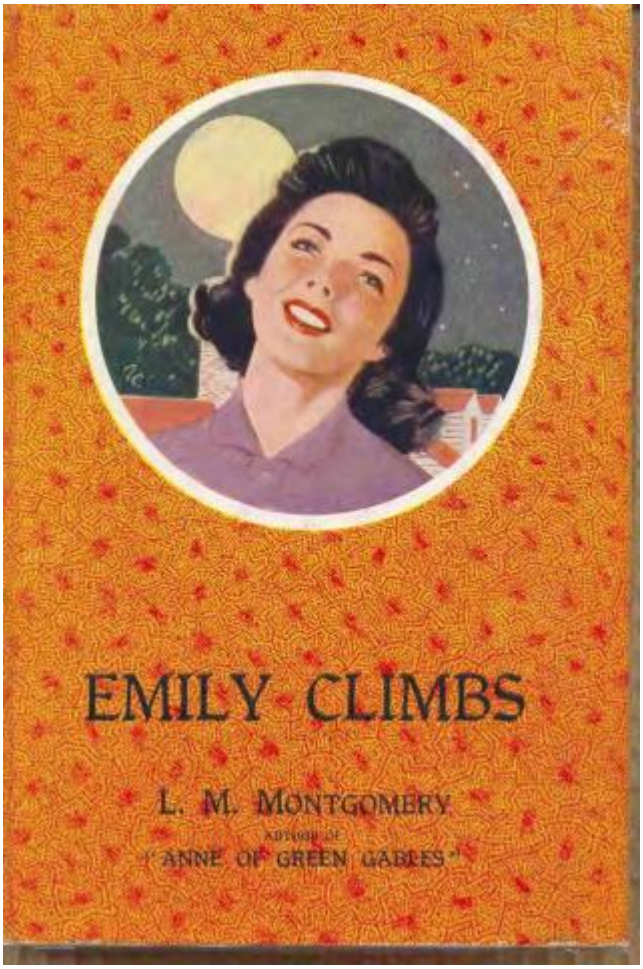


Left: Book cover of Emily of New Moon. 1923. KindredSpaces.ca, 542 ENM-MS-1ST.
Center: Book cover of Emily Climbs. 1925. KindredSpaces.ca, 543 EC-MS-1ST 1925.
Right: Book cover of Emily's Quest. 1929. KindredSpaces.ca, 841 EQ-CP.

Experiencing Time Through the *Emily* Series

The more I learn about Montgomery as writer, and myself as reader, the more I am intrigued with how in fiction she created a sustaining alternative text for her lived life. The *Emily* series, arguably Montgomery's most deliberate alternative life text, explores a gifted writer's developing consciousness and practices. Key to Emily's emerging power as a writer is a spontaneous and a practised engagement with time. In *The Art of Time,* Jean-Louis Servan-Schreiber calls this engagement "experienced time."[2] I am going to use his concept of time to consider how Montgomery reshaped in fiction her own writing story so that readers like me can experience meaning and purpose in conscious engagement with time through her style, subject, and process.

Jean-Louis Servan-Schreiber's *The Art of Time* was published in 1988, the same year as Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time.* At first glance they could not be more different: *The Art of Time*, written for a wide popular audience, is about choosing an attitude to time; Hawking's book, though also written for a popular audience, is about discovering, through scientific theories involving time, a key to the universe. Interestingly, both authors rely on metaphors and analogies to make their cases, and, even more importantly, both assume the very point Montgomery's novels also make repeatedly: each individual's experience of time is unique[3] but is subject to patterns or forms or laws that when recognized may be beneficially accessed or employed. Underlying Montgomery's descriptions of beauty in nature and her fictional portraits is, I suggest, her belief in a mysterious and variously accessible fluidity of time. With Emily, Montgomery reveals time to be engaged energy. Fifty-five years after first reading them, I am realizing how the *Emily* books attempt to engage the energy of seeing and feeling rather than just to describe what was seen or felt.



Book cover of *Emily Climbs*. 1953. KindredSpaces.ca, 069 EC-H53.

Art of Time

In the middle four chapters of the middle book of the *Emily* trilogy, *Emily Climbs*, telling the story of the Bradshaw boy and his rescue, I suggest Montgomery describes how an artist can experience and reconcile at least two seemingly conflicting forms of lived time: that is, the time of heightened perception beyond conventions and boundaries and the time of involuntary physical and emotional reflexes concerning daily conditions and events. Emily may respond with rapture and pain in both forms of time, and this sensitivity is crucial for her writing, but it is her ability to move from one form of time to another that shapes her as an artist and as a resilient and loving human being. I suggest that in the carefully crafted scenes surrounding the Bradshaw boy story, Montgomery illustrates how someone observant of patterns may learn to read time creatively in life and in art. Emily has the potential to become a master of time—and so do we, according to Jean-Louis Servan-Schreiber. Emily's story, read with his conception of time in mind, gives me a new way to look at time and choice in my own life as well as in Emily's and Montgomery's.

Three Forms of Time

In *The Art of Time,* Jean-Louis Servan-Schreiber declares that "For all people, the use of time has ever been closely connected with the meaning of life."[4] Thirty years ago he was warning readers that soon they would be so strung together by electronic devices and the desperate need to stay connected and available that they would not be able to experience anything for more than a few seconds without craving and seeking interruption. He predicted that it would be more and more difficult for people to read uninterrupted, much less spend time thinking and creating and planning. Television, the telephone, and computers of all kinds would, he said, slice up or atomize our personal time so thoroughly that we would not be able to reflect on meaning, much less try to create it. His book is a plea for readers to take control of their relationships with time, rather than feeling breathlessly oppressed by them. His chapters on "Experienced Time" and "Mastery of Time" speak strongly to me as a reader and rereader of Montgomery, and I suggest that Montgomery's treatment

of time in her fiction is akin to the “mastery of time” he hopes his readers will undertake.

Servan-Schreiber describes three forms of time: “nature’s time,” that he also calls “cosmic time,” which is time since the Big Bang (readers today would naturally think of Stephen Hawking’s work); this is the natural time of our solar system with “day and night, cold and warmth, green and white”—a form of time that is indifferent to human beings. We are, he says, situated within “nature’s time,” like it or not. Then there is “society’s time” that governs all our relationships and interpersonal interactions. Conventional living conforms to this form of time even though it enters us from the outside and must be learned. And, finally, he speaks of “experienced time,” which is, he says, “intimately mingled with social time, yet we must not confuse the two. Consisting of perceptions, feelings, and biology, experienced time is—for us humans at any rate—the most real of the three times.”[5] He goes on to say that in order to understand “experienced time” each person must take stock of why they have the impressions they do about time—where they learned to be governed by “society’s time,” where they give in to others’ demands, and when they are able to insist on what they need to feel whole and free. Servan-Schreiber says that if we know our own patterns of time, we may be able to change our uses of it and our attitudes to it in order to create new ways to experience it better. Rather than accepting the culturally conditioned equation of time and money, with the emphasis being on constant loss, we can reimagine our daily life with time as the only wealth equally available to all, and limitless. We can, he says, position ourselves in relation to time to feel we have eternity every moment. And this, I suggest, is what Montgomery demonstrates and teaches persuasively in a concentrated form in the four central chapters of *Emily Climbs.*

Mastery of Time: Four Chapters

The four chapter titles together suggest how the writer directs and builds Emily’s sense of time: “At the Sign of the Haystack,” “Haven,” “The Woman Who Spanked the King,” and “‘The Thing That Couldn’t.’” The full significance of each title becomes apparent only when the surprises of all four have been revealed: “At the Sign of the Haystack” plays with the idea of “sign,” and “Haven” does not seem to offer shelter for anyone; “The Woman Who Spanked the King” sounds like a contrived interruption to the real story and does not make complete sense until “‘The Thing That Couldn’t’” is finally explained in the fourth chapter. Nothing is

exactly what it seems.

These carefully constructed and richly layered chapters work together—each deeper and more complex than its title suggests—in the same way that the pivotal moments in Emily's later life in *Emily's Quest* work to show us the artist's necessity to live with paradox. Emily experiences how time stretches and collapses, how it contains and releases. The chapters together suggest that what Emily experiences as magic and beauty and wonder and also agony and fear are all shaped by her ability to experience time creatively and fully. Montgomery invites her reader to experience as Emily does, to see what she sees and feels, and to perceive the larger picture of what Emily's story means as it is read and reread. In knowing herself and her gifts and exactly what she is willing to sacrifice in terms of "society's time" and its conventional restrictions, Emily is learning to focus effectively on her purpose and is, thus, as Servan-Schreiber describes, cultivating a mastery of time.

Altering Perceptions of Time: "At the Sign of the Haystack"

In "At the Sign of the Haystack," Montgomery marks a dramatic shift in Emily's perception of time with an almost incantatory repetition. Ilse and Emily are following what they mistakenly believe is the correct path through the Malvern woods; Montgomery repeats the words "she liked"[6] to imitate Emily's movement into trance and to invite the reader to share the feeling:

> The world disappeared behind them and they were alone in a realm of wild beauty. Emily thought the walk through the woods all too short, though tired Ilse, whose foot had turned on a pebble earlier in the day, found it unpleasantly long. Emily liked everything about it—she liked to see that shining gold head of Ilse's slipping through the grey-green trunks, under the long swaying boughs—she liked the faint dream-like notes of sleepy birds—she liked the little wandering, whispering, tricksy wind o' dusk among the tree crests—she liked the incredibly delicate fragrance of wood flowers and growths—she liked the little ferns that brushed Ilse's silken ankles—she liked that slender, white, tantalising thing which gleamed out for a moment adown the dim vista of a winding path—was it a birch or a wood-nymph? No

> matter—it had given her that stab of poignant rapture she called "the flash"—her priceless thing whose flitting, uncalculated moments were worth cycles of mere existence.[7]

Sight, hearing, touch, smell, haptic sense of place: all conspire to conjure rapture and awareness of the infinite. In addition to the six repetitions of "she liked" the passage is loaded with lush images (such as "shining gold," "dream-like notes," "swaying bough," "whispering wind," "delicate fragrance," and "silken ankles"). We read the landscape and pace with Emily deep into myth, away from everyday markers of time or distance. Emily's trance-like seeing transforms Ilse into a wood nymph and the transition to mystical time is completed with the "flash." The "flash" gives Emily a "stab of poignant rapture"—the word "stab" signals intense pain as well as pleasure. Montgomery situates the "flitting, uncalculated moments" of the flash in "cycles" of time—not linear time, but cyclical, repeating expressions of infinity. The infinite is detectable only in flashes because our world, Montgomery seems to suggest, cannot sustain awareness for more than a few moments. Montgomery shapes the passage so that we must notice how ecstasy is bracketed by everyday annoyances and interruptions. The artist must be able to deal with both. Emily may be oblivious to Ilse's pain and may transform her into a golden-headed, elusive beauty whose silken ankles even the ferns wish to caress, but soon enough Ilse's annoyance will erupt to challenge Emily. Similarly, the "flash" stabs Emily into glory, but she thuds back to Earth seconds later. The words "abruptly" and "flatly" later describe Emily's dismay at finding she has been misled in the woods, not led by a muse, and they are lost.

The remainder of the chapter is a purposeful alternation of irritation and ecstasy. Ilse is cranky and Emily tries to cajole her. At first, they are almost daunted at the prospect of spending the night in an open field, but then they determine sleeping on a haystack will be an adventure. They worry about the coming night, but are soon transported by the beauty of a sunset. As they climb the haystack, Ilse sounds the note of caution: "Suppose it rains,"[8] but they together experience "wild, fragrant grasses" with a "great sky of faint rose above them," and bats and swallows swooping "darkly above them against the paling western gold" while aspens talk in "silvery whispers." The friends, including Montgomery's readers, share the same vision and sense of loveliness, the same perception of timelessness, and Montgomery seems ready to seal the moment firmly with magic: "An ancient enchantment was suddenly upon them, and the white magic of the sky and the dark

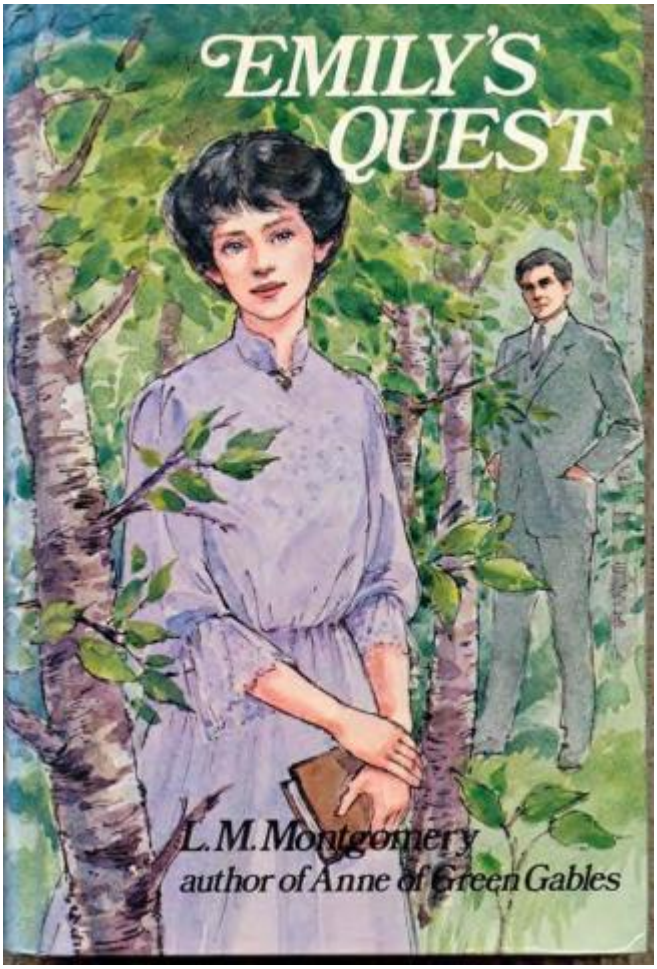
magic of the woods wove the final spell of a potent incantation."[9] Uplifted by beauty, Emily declares the world of annoyances does not exist: "Were we vexed with that horrid old man and his beastly politics today, Ilse? Why, he doesn't exist—not in *this* world, anyway." And having dismissed that everyday world of cares and irritations, she affirms this poetic world by describing for Ilse her Wind Woman.

Had Montgomery been merely indulging herself and Emily in purple passages, she would have ended Ilse's and Emily's conversation right here. But Montgomery is not urging her readers to imagine an ease in sustaining visions and perceptions of beauty. Instead, she shows that discord is a constant possibility. Genuinely admiring Emily's Wind Woman, Ilse innocently asks how Emily thinks of such things. Emily is annoyed. She responds to Ilse "shortly," and quick-tempered Ilse flares right back: "For heaven's sake, Emily, don't be such a crank!" And it is here with this real-life annoyance that Montgomery makes her point about the young artist's need to move fluidly between qualities of time if she is to be strong in life and in art. Montgomery says, "For a second the wonderful world in which Emily was at the moment living, trembled and wavered like a disturbed reflection in water."[10]

The use of a reflection in water to characterize the imaginative world's relationship to the daily-perceived world is provocative. On one level, the image and metaphor are straightforward: the water-surface image seems complete and whole unless a real-world action ripples its surface, destroying the illusion and reminding the perceiver how fragile a thing is reflection. Consider another level: the trance-encouraged perceptions, the flash, and the loveliness of the evening suggest that infinite beauty resides in the imaginative world, not in this world. This world faintly reflects what is always present in an ideal state. The "disturbed reflection," rather than indicating the insubstantiality of the imagined world, indicates instead the insubstantiality of this world that can only reflect what is in fact eternal. Emily's perception of beauty, her secure footing in that other world where beauty resides, is what wavers, not the firmness of the imagined world. Like the "flash" itself, the reflecting surface suggests light and beauty are bound together. Eternal time is experienced as moments of illumination. To be open to reflection, metaphorically to flashes of light, is the work of the artist and the struggle of the human being wishing to experience what art seeks to capture.

Emily's fear of losing sight of the beauty they have together felt sweeps aside personal pride, and she entreats Ilse: "'Don't let's quarrel *here*!,' she implored."[11] Emily is not being false to herself or giving in to Ilse. The developing artist must

acknowledge priorities. Passionate and distractible, Emily must know herself well if she is to keep herself available time and time again to light and shadow. The moments of engagement and perception are fleeting and fragile, and a failure to move into them—and then to move back to them when they are suspended but not destroyed—is the challenge of the artist and the appreciators of art who wish to experience the full intensity of life. The artist must always be ready to engage and also to re-engage. There is a clear contrast between Ilse's reactions and Emily's. Ilse's mood may affect their shared time, but what is at stake for Emily is much larger—her yearning toward beauty needs discipline and practice if Emily is going to be able to capture the visions and the words beauty inspires.



Book cover of *Emily's Quest*. 1981. KindredSpaces.ca, 015 EQ-AR.

We who read Montgomery again and again may remember that both *Emily Climbs* and *Emily's Quest* quote Emerson's poem "The Poet" in their opening pages. In Emerson's poem,[12] the final lesson is that the poet must be ready at any moment to overhear the "random word" spoken by the gods. And the poet must be at all times a fit instrument in order to perceive the word. The poet must live intensely and

wholly between moments of inspiration, and must not mistake the moments themselves for all of life. In “At the Sign of the Haystack,” teenaged Emily, intensely alive—intent on beauty—is also being urged to learn that perception and experience must be open to interruption and also to glorious transformation. If the artist is to be able to live life fully aware and engaged and, thus, available to be fit for the “random word” when it comes, the artist needs to be able to perceive time as fluid, where interruptions and irritations can make way for reflection and rapture. It is no accident that Montgomery has Emily recall Emerson’s poem during the latter part of this chapter. Montgomery urges her readers to read Emily’s life as a purposeful process of self-recognition and determined practice—with rewarding flashes of joyous success to offset despair.

The last part of this chapter is a remarkable study of the young artist’s perception of time and meaning. While Ilse sleeps, Emily is transported into one continuous stream of rapture. For the duration of the night, Montgomery does not allow the workaday world to interrupt Emily’s heightened consciousness, though Emily knows that world is waiting for her when the splendour passes. The narrator explains in words that sound very much like a distillation of Montgomery’s years of passages in her journals about her own perceptions and determination: “Emily always looked back to that night spent under the stars as a sort of milestone. Everything in it and of it ministered to her. It filled her with its beauty, which she must later give to the world.” For her, the northern lights become “empyrean armies,” and “Emily lay and watched them in rapture. Her soul was washed pure in that great bath of splendour. She was a high priestess … .”[13] Echoing words from Montgomery’s own journals and essays,[14] Emily experiences the great gift of expanded time:

> Such moments come rarely in any life, but when they do come they are inexpressibly wonderful—as if the finite were for a second infinity—as if humanity were for a space uplifted into divinity—as if all ugliness had vanished, with the pure ecstasy of it. … She was afraid to move or breathe lest she break the current of beauty that was flowing through her. Life seemed like a wonderful instrument on which to play supernal harmonies.

Negotiating Time

Almost in the exact centre of the trilogy, this scene marks Emily’s awareness of her gift and its challenges. She prays, “Oh, God, make me worthy,” and then thinks of

Emerson's poem "The Poet" and hopes that she will be worthy to carry back to humanity the "dialogue divine" from the world of perfect beauty she glimpses. Emily mistakenly characterizes the time without Emerson's "random word" and "dialogue divine" as "the everyday world of sordid market-place and clamorous street"[15] in her youthful black-and-white conceptions and depictions of either-or conditions. But young Emily is learning to perceive and to negotiate time effectively. As their evening proves, there are not just two worlds to perceive—one of perfect beauty and one of the "sordid market-place." The everyday world has many forms of beauty and offers frequent opportunity for rapturous engagement. The artist needs to be aware and open for engagement and not so fixated on one form that she cannot perceive another. Emily will learn this lesson fully by the end of *Emily's Quest*, where "mere beauty" can no longer satisfy or replace her human need for love.[16] But here, it is enough for the young artist to realize that despite the niggling irritations of daily life, beauty can fill her whole being and demand devotion.

There is no hint of irony or humour in the passages describing Emily's rapture. Emily's experience of the infinite in the finite is Montgomery's point, and nothing detracts from this magical moment. But there is deliberate comedy at the chapter's end. Emily's girlish dream of herself as the greatest female poet of ancient Greece, like the romantic daydreams of Anne Shirley, is comic and brings the reader—and the characters—back to the everyday world. Inspired by her visions, Emily dreams she is "Sappho springing from the Leucadian rock" and falls off the haystack to Ilse's and her own amazement. Laura Robinson has written a whole fascinating paper with this quotation in her title, using Sappho—rightly, I think—to signal a pattern of imagery and narrative preferences that emerge in Montgomery's descriptions of female friendships.[17] I do not imagine Montgomery was making a conscious allusion to what has become popularly known as Sapphism, but it is interesting that she uses moments related to Frederica Campbell in this chapter and again in "The Woman Who Spanked the King"[18] chapter as though her most important female friendship is woven into her conception of the artist and of art.

However we interpret the reference to Sappho, and the weight apart from comic contrast that it is meant to have here, Montgomery readers will remember that it was Frede and Maud who made the pact that Ilse and Emily make just before Ilse goes to sleep. The girls whisper together, sharing secrets, and then, "Finally, they made a solemn compact that whichever one of them died first was to come back to the other if it were possible."[19] Some of the most distressing and poignant passages

in Montgomery's journals describe the death of Frederica Campbell, in January 1919, just five years before this *Emily* book was written. Almost overwhelmed by grief, leaning close to her dying friend, Montgomery attempted to remind Frede of their old promise: she who died first would come back to the other.[20] In *Emily Climbs*, through the "alembic of fiction," Montgomery acknowledges that moment from her recent past, stripping it of sting and rendering it wistful, gently rueful, "How many such compacts have been made! And has even one ever been kept?"[21] In fiction, the pact is an unmistakable way to signal the power of the bond between these two friends. Ilse's irritations and volatility are meant to seem as necessary to Emily the artist as they are to Emily the friend. Emily's consecration to beauty, too, is then, in the presence of her sleeping friend, an unconscious but necessary witness to a life that may include time for this everyday world and time beyond its constraints. Art must have everyday life in its register, and the artist must be able to respond to the full range of life's experiences.

Finite and Infinite: "Haven"

The next three chapters also deal with Emily's perceptions of the finite and the infinite, each involving pain and ecstasy. Coming after her rapture and consecration on the haystack, the alternations between the immediate and the eternal are especially important.

"Haven" begins with irony: "When you have fallen asleep listening to the hymns of the gods, it is something of an anti-climax to be wakened by an ignominious tumble from a haystack." Undaunted, Emily exclaims over the beauty of a spider's web covered with dew, and hungry Ilse "jeers," "Write a poem on it." Interestingly, it is Emily who must remind Ilse that their night on the haystack will remain a lovely memory only if Ilse does not talk about it to other people. Emily understands human nature better than does Ilse, who grumbles, "People have such beastly minds," but still does not really understand what Emily, the observer of life, perceives clearly. Ilse lives in current time, a rebel against what Servan-Schreiber calls "society's time" perhaps, but not liberated as Emily is by her kind of "experienced time." Seconds after Ilse has complained of people's "beastly minds," Montgomery encourages the reader to experience beauty with Emily, describing the sunrise Emily notes in her Jimmy book: "Indian Head was a flaming mount of splendour. The far-off hills turned beautifully purple against the radiant sky. Even the bare, ugly Hardscrabble Road was transfigured and luminous in hazes of silver. The fields and

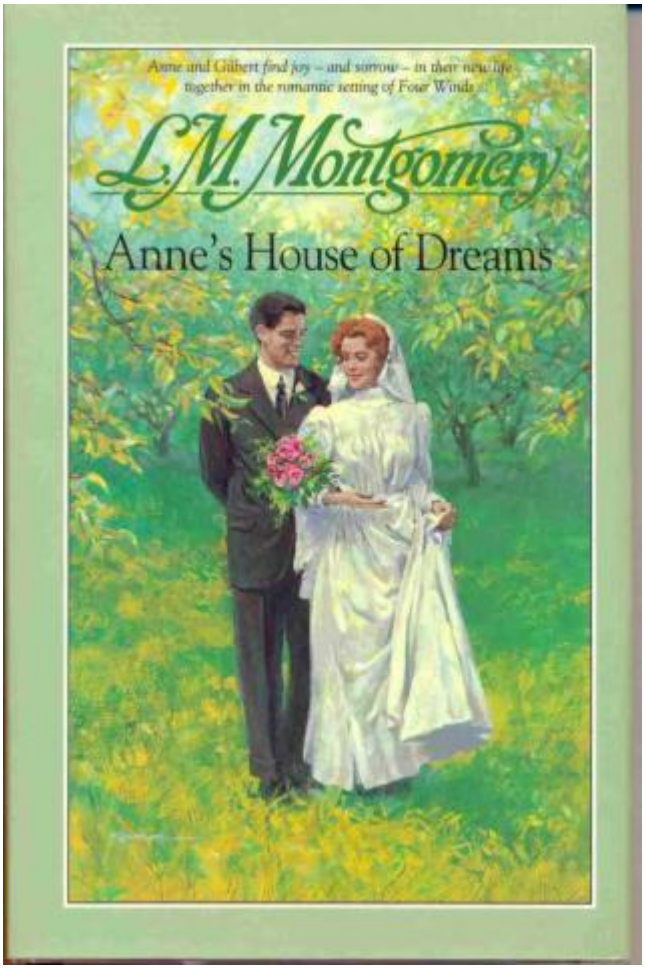
woods were very lovely in the faint pearly lustre.”[22] Emily reads the infinite in the finite.

The story of the Bradshaw boy darkens their day, but Emily is still able to engage so powerfully with the spirit of beauty that she steps into another form of time, forgetting her pain and the threat of the weather. She is entranced by the little house she calls hers and refuses to be rushed by Ilse, who finally says, “When you get through with talking to your house we’d better hurry on.”[23] With her uncanny ability to pick out the most important feature of a place or a personality, Emily is especially drawn to the little window over the front door, seeing it with her inspired vision as “glowing like a jewel in the sunshine out of its dark shingle setting.”[24] This is the window in the closet where Allan Bradshaw is trapped and is lying on the floor exhausted and near death. Later, when Emily draws the Scobie cottage in unmistakable detail in her sleep, we know how thoroughly she has read its vernacular.

One more time in this chapter, in their search for “haven,” Emily halts their journey. They spot a house that, like the Scobie cottage, speaks to Emily so irresistibly she must stop in the rain to write about it. Montgomery’s description invites the reader to experience with Emily a beauty akin to the “flash.” Here is just the end of the passage:

> The near brook valley was filled with young spruces, dark-green in the rain. The grey clouds hung heavily over it. Suddenly the sun broke through the clouds in the west for one magical moment. The hill of clover meadows flashed instantly into incredibly vivid green. The triangle of sea shimmered into violet. The old house gleamed like white marble against the emerald of its hilly background, and the inky black sky over and around it. “Oh,” gasped Emily, “I never saw anything so wonderful!”[25]

The shapes, the textures, the rich colours—dark-green, vivid green, emerald, violet, inky black, marble white—dazzle Emily’s senses, and when Ilse asks why she couldn’t write it from memory instead of standing in the rain, Emily uses yet another sense to explain: “I’d have missed some of the flavour then.”[26] Emily exults in capturing just the right words, and, like Montgomery herself, she is able to forget all else while she writes.



Book cover of *Anne's House of Dreams*. 1989. KindredSpaces.ca, 093 AHDMS 1989 version.

Inside the Bradshaw house, nosy Mrs. Hollinger supplies comic relief, fulfilling what the narrator describes in *Anne's House of Dreams* as the "comedy that ever peeps around the corner at the tragedy of life."27 Mrs. Hollinger stands in for the matter-of-fact workaday world, taking some unconscious pleasure in misfortune that is not her own, and thoroughly alive to "society's time" in hosting a Murray of New Moon. "Haven" ends with the wind shrieking and snarling outside the windows—a long way from the "grey fairy" spirit of the Wind Woman from the night of Emily's perfect communion with the infinite. Here Emily wonders, "Could it be only twenty-four hours since that moonlit, summery glamour of the haystack and ferny pasture? Why, that must have been in another world."28

The next chapter, "The Woman Who Spanked the King," is a masterly treatment of time and of the power of art. It begins simply, with Emily waking suddenly from what she thinks is a dream of finding the lost boy. Confused and sleepy, she imagines she is still dreaming when she sees a tidy Highland woman sitting composedly in the

bedroom where she and Ilse have slept. Mrs. MacIntyre's story within Emily's story is an illustration of how and why storytelling is honoured as art. This is not just an interlude or interruption in Emily's story. Instead, it is in miniature what the book is as a whole—a transforming of (supposed) real life into art and, through that art, giving meaning to life. We enter with Emily into the stream of the story, with its own command of time and sequence, and we, like Emily, forget about the Bradshaw boy while we listen to the comic spanking of the prince embedded as it is in the tragic story of the death of Mrs. MacIntyre's son. Mrs. MacIntyre had given up praying when she discovered that her favourite son was freezing to death while she prayed. But when Emily asks if she can write up the story, Mrs. MacIntyre realizes God has answered her unspoken prayer. Art comes from life and, in turn, reshapes life.

With the fourth chapter, "'The Thing That Couldn't,'" Montgomery closes this sequence about Emily's learning. At the beginning of the chapter, Ilse "grumbled" that it seemed "like an age since they left Shrewsbury," but Emily is aware of more:

> Emily had an even stronger feeling of a long passage of time. Her wakeful, enraptured night under the moon had seemed in itself like a year of some strange soul-growth. And this past night had been wakeful also, in a very different way, and she had roused from her brief sleep at its close with an odd, rather unpleasant sensation of some confused and troubled journey ... .[29]

When they find Emily's Jimmy book with its drawing of the Scobie cottage and the *X* clearly marking where the boy is to be found, Emily is horrified, not delighted. She does not want to be an unconscious instrument for the uncanny to work through. The reader must see, even if Emily does not yet, that her plea on the haystack to be a worthy instrument of the perfection she has glimpsed is inextricably linked with this ability to move beyond measurable boundaries and time. Her exhaustion from the strain of sending her spirit out searching for the boy is also a lesson about engagement, different in quality from her earlier two psychic experiences in the series (concerning Ilse's mother and Mad Mr. Morrison).[30] Her own artist's reading of the details of the Scobie cottage—her enraptured engagement with the house, itself partly inspired by what is calling wordlessly from inside the house—these belong directly to her development as a writer and to her willingness to ignore "society's time" and the constraints of a clock. But such engagement takes energy as well as willingness. She is human, and she must be careful to choose—when she

has a choice—when to engage.

At the end of this fourth chapter, after all the exclamations of surprise and the drama of the boy's discovery, Emily has developed a new awareness of herself. When she and Ilse set out together again on the road, Emily sees the beauty of the landscape, and she can refuse to follow. Montgomery makes the image and Emily's choice clear:

> When they left the little white house on the windy hill the sun was breaking through the clouds and the harbour waters were dancing madly in it. The landscape was full of the wild beauty that comes in the wake of a spent storm and the Western Road stretched before them in loop and hill and dip of wet, red allurement; but Emily turned away from it.[31]

Like the storm itself, Emily's emotional energy is spent, and while she can acknowledge the "red allurement" of the road, she knows she is not ready to engage with it fully, and so she leaves it for another day. This discernment is a huge step in her writing life, and it marks the depth of her commitment to be as fully engaged with beauty—with art—as she can. Her artist's intuition urges her to rest her embodied spirit, and she does.

Montgomery's Aesthetic

In Montgomery's aesthetic, each exquisite thing is a finite expression of an infinite beauty; each work of art is a finite expression of an ideal. When Emily and Ilse leave the Bradshaw house, Emily's choice not to follow "red allurement" is a canny, vital affirmation of her vow to engage. According to Servan-Schreiber, mastery of time requires unflinching self-knowledge; you must understand why you choose to give in to "society's time" at the expense of your own "experienced time." In *Emily of New Moon* Emily commits herself to writing; in *Emily Climbs* she chooses the "Alpine Path" as her journey and signing the "shining scroll" as her destination.[32] Society's time, in the form of high school, shapes her routines, but these four chapters take Emily out of that predictable routine and structure. Away from that defining structure, she makes a commitment to her art that also commits her to choosing mindfully how she spends the energy of every moment of her time. In Servan-Schreiber's terms, Emily has even clearer goals, now, to shape her choices. Emily's commitment to art is a commitment to negotiate her experiences of time, to

recognize time's fluidity and her own energy.

The time it takes to read and to imagine vividly Montgomery's lush descriptions and detailed scenes, in the *Emily* books especially, is meant, I think, to imitate the pace of transformation. If we sympathetically read Emily's seeing and engage what she does, then we may take that ability into our daily lives and recover wonder and a sense of expansiveness. Emily often experiences light as timeless beauty. Montgomery challenges her sympathetic readers to be able to engage repeatedly, meaningfully with this light. Servan-Schreiber says, "The most obvious, although not necessarily the most important, goal is to make better use of one's time. The most fulfilling—and the hardest—goal is to relearn to profit from the moment with the intensity we had at the age of seven as we came upon a shaft of sunlight in a pine woods."[33] Similarly, one of current bestselling author Louise Penny's characters, speaking of painting and a special quality of light, describes what many of us fought against for years in the academy concerning Montgomery's novels: "Beautiful isn't in fashion. Edgy, dark, stark, cynical, that's what galleries and curators want. They seem to think they're more complex, more challenging, but I can tell you, they're not. Light is every bit as challenging as dark. We can discover a great deal about ourselves by looking at beauty."[34]

In the "Author's Note" at the end of her 2017 novel, *Glass Houses*, Louise Penny describes what it is she thinks keeps readers coming back to her novels, mostly set in the fictional Quebec village of Three Pines. She talks about a quality of life, an attitude to time and being, shared by the familiar characters of her series. If we substitute "Avonlea" or "Blair Water" or even "Mystawis" for Louise Penny's "Three Pines," I think we come close to the core of Montgomery's alternative life, the life she lived in and through her novels, and that we choose to live repeatedly with her:

> Some might argue that Three Pines itself isn't real, and they'd be right, but limited in their view. The village does not exist, physically. But I think of it as existing in ways that are far more important and powerful. Three Pines is a state of mind. When we choose tolerance over hate. Kindness over cruelty. Goodness over bullying. When we choose to be hopeful, not cynical. Then we live in Three Pines.[35]

The *Emily* books suggest how a writer experiences time in fluid, repeatable engagements with meaning and values.

I will continue reading *time* and *reading* time with Montgomery because of the ways she addresses the assumed infinite in the seeming finite. Emily's story succeeds because it is not wholly autobiographical. Instead, Montgomery consciously distilled and transformed her questions and her yearnings and her determined affirmations into a fictional biography of a writer who succeeds in keeping friendship, finding love, and staying tuned as an instrument fit for "dialogue divine." I will continue to companion Emily as she learns and Montgomery as she urges me to learn about engaging with the energy that is life, perhaps mastering time. Montgomery invites me to re-enter this Emily rhythm, a consciousness of and a process of meaningful engagement with the moment. I hold an *Emily* book in my hand to affirm that while reading and imagining and acting with others on what I learn and value, I—and we—do indeed have all the time in the world.

Acknowledgement: Banner image derived from book cover of *Emily of New Moon* . 1923. Kindred Spaces.ca, 542 ENM-MS-1ST 1923 version.

About the Author: Elizabeth Epperly, BA, MA, Ph.D., LL.D., fourth President of the University of Prince Edward Island, Professor Emerita of English, founder of the L.M. Montgomery Institute at UPEI, imagined she was reading Montgomery for herself even though her eyes were closed and she was just learning to manage the alphabet — so effortlessly did she enter Montgomery's world when her father read to her sister and to her. Many Montgomery-related and inspired essays, talks, and books later, Epperly's most recent works include a creative memoir, *Power Notes: Leadership by Analogy* (Rock's Mills Press, 2017), and a children's book, *Summer in the Land of Anne* (illustrated by her sister carolynepperly.com), published by Acorn Press in 2018. See www.elizabethepperly.com.

- 1 Rubio and Waterston, "Introduction" xx.
- 2 Servan-Schreiber, *Art* .
- 3 "In the theory of relativity there is no unique absolute time, but instead each individual has his own personal measure of time that depends on where he is and how he is moving" (Hawking, *Brief History* 33).
- 4 Servan-Schreiber 14.
- 5 Servan-Schreiber 33–34.

- 6 Montgomery was fond of using a list of “likes.” Her most famous list is in the 31 January 1920 journal entry, where she poses and answers Ruskin’s question “What do you like? Tell me what you like and I’ll tell you what you are.” Interestingly, “I like my children” is first, and “I like all kinds of books if they’re well written” is second on the (unnumbered) list of forty-nine, while “I like my husband” is thirty-ninth. From Montgomery *CJ* 4 (31 Jan. 1920): 242. The least known of her lists of likes was lost from the pages of *Jane of Lantern Hill* when two sheets of her manuscript stuck together, and the missing manuscript page was not noticed, evidently, until I separated those pages a couple of decades ago when studying the manuscript page by page. See Epperly “Approaching" 81–82.
- 7 Montgomery, *EC* 173.
- 8 Montgomery, *EC* 174.
- 9 Montgomery, *EC* 175.
- 10 Montgomery, *EC* 176.
- 11 Montgomery, *EC* 176.
- 12 See Epperly, *“Emily’s Quest*" 220–21.
- 13 Montgomery, *EC* 177.
- 14 Most recently, Catherine Reid has ended her book *The Landscapes of Anne of Green Gables* with a similarly worded quotation from Montgomery’s 1911 article “The Woods in Winter.” See Reid 250.
- 15 Montgomery, *EC* 177–178.
- 16 Montgomery, *EQ* 228; see my discussion of this passage in "*Emily’s Quest*" 219–220.
- 17 Robinson, "'Sappho Springing.'"
- 18 Montgomery, *EC* 192. Mrs. MacIntyre asks if Emily is from Highland Scottish stock and Presbyterian and says, “'They will be the only decent things to be’” just as in real life, to Montgomery’s amusement, Frederica Campbell asked if someone she met was Maritime and Presbyterian, claiming “They’re the only decent things to be!” See Montgomery, *CJ* 4 (1918-1921): 348.
- 19 Montgomery, *Emily Climbs* 176.
- 20 Montgomery, *CJ* 4 (1918-1921): 102.
- 21 Montgomery, *EC* 176.
- 22 Montgomery, *EC* 179.
- 23 Montgomery, *EC* 179.
- 24 Montgomery, *EC* 179.
- 25 Montgomery, *EC* 184.

- 26 Montgomery, *Emily Climbs* 185.
- 27 Montgomery, *AH* 197.
- 28 Montgomery, *EC* 190.
- 29 Montgomery, *EC* 199.
- 30 Respectively, in *Emily of New Moon* and earlier in *Emily Climbs*.
- 31 Montgomery, *EC* 206.
- 32 Exactly as Montgomery did in her own youth, adopting the images and lines from the *Godey's Lady's Book* poem, "The Fringed Gentian," written by Ella Rodman Church and Augusta De Bubna, as her inspiration. She pasted a printed copy of the poem in her Red Scrapbook. See Montgomery, *Imagining Anne* 127. She used the "Alpine Path" as the defining metaphor for her own life story in 1917. See Montgomery, *AP*. In 1926, she copied the poem from her scrapbook into her journal pages, unconsciously(?) turning the interrogative of the final stanza into a declarative so that "How may I?" became "How I may." In the 22 November 1926, journal entry, she said of the poem: "It seemed to me then to express all the secret feelings and desires of my being – especially the last verse." See Montgomery's *CJ* 6 (22 Nov. 1926): 97.
- 33 Servan-Schreiber 40.
- 34 Penny, *Trick* 266.
- 35 Penny, *Glass Houses* 391.

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