

“That Unholy Tendency to Laughter”:  
L.M. Montgomery’s  
Iconoclastic Affirmation of Faith  
in *Anne of Green Gables*

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*Résumé* : Cet article analyse la vie et l’œuvre de L.M. Montgomery. Il s’attache en particulier aux déchirements entre, d’une part, son rejet conscient de certains principes chrétiens, hérités de la pratique presbytérienne de Cavendish, et, d’autre part, l’exploration passionnée d’une foi chrétienne dans *Anne . . . La Maison au pignons verts*. En subvertissant de manière amusée l’image d’un christianisme traditionnel conforme à la raison, le roman propose en filigrane une foi individuelle et vivante, approfondie par la passion, l’imagination et le don d’émerveillement. L’étude du roman de Montgomery ouvre ainsi un nouveau champ d’enquête sur le presbytérianisme canadien et les réflexions en cours sur le puritanisme, la Bible judéo-chrétienne, et les perceptions de l’enfant. Cet article s’adresse enfin à tous qui ont déjà considéré avec humour les pratiques religieuses.

*Summary*: This paper investigates the competitive space between L.M. Montgomery’s conscious rejection of several tenets of Christianity as frequently practiced by her own Cavendish Presbyterianism and her passionate, imaginative exploration of Christian faith in her novel *Anne of Green Gables*. Through humorous subversion, Montgomery dethrones the idol of an overly rational conventional Christianity in order to offer instead a compelling window on or icon of a personal living faith that is informed by passion, imagination, and wonder. Her complex viewpoint offers a rich field of inquiry into Canadian Presbyterianism at the turn of the twentieth century as well as ongoing discourses about Puritanism, the Judeo-Christian Bible, and related perceptions of children. This paper is dedicated to all people who have ever found the practice of religion deeply humorous.

L.M. Montgomery's treatment of religious faith in *Anne of Green Gables* offers a rich field of inquiry into the question of a subversion of conventional religion as an exploration of faith. Many scholars address the conflictual nature of Montgomery's religious viewpoint(s): Frank Davey argues for an ironic reading of faith as mere youthful optimism (180-81), whereas Elizabeth Rollins Epperly asserts the profound and adult choice "to believe in harmony and joy" (35), while Deirdre Kessler notes "a numinous, profoundly spiritual dimension" in Montgomery's work (234). Rosemary Ross Johnston argues that Montgomery's fiction is grounded in "the coherence of the underframing impulse" of Christian spirituality (8), whereas Gavin White invites the reader to consider the overall Christian orthodoxy of what Montgomery herself sometimes regarded as unorthodox (87). Certainly, it is curious to consider the possible "orthodoxy" of a writer who in her life writing frequently rejected central tenets of the Christian faith she was raised to believe in and who is often considered to be a subversive religious writer (see Rubio, "Subverting the Trite"; Foster and Simons). In what possible sense might her subversive exploration be regarded as an iconoclastic affirmation of faith? How might the term "orthodox" apply to a writer often considered unorthodox? And are these apparent tensions in Montgomery's religious viewpoint(s) reconcilable?

The complexity of Montgomery's own spiritual journey of faith and doubt is perhaps best addressed by considering the phenomenon of there being two L.M. Montgomeries living in a state of painful and searching contradiction. As Edith Katherine Smith reasons in her contribution to *The Lucy Maud Montgomery Album* (1999), Montgomery can be viewed as "a passionate Puritan" who "lived between uneasy opposites" (4), between what Montgomery herself identified as "the passionate Montgomery blood and the Puritan Macneill conscience," where "Neither is strong enough wholly to control the other" (*Selected Journals* I [8 Apr. 1898] 213). In the developing argument of Montgomery's iconoclastic affirmation of faith, I will examine how Marilla Cuthbert's growing experience of "that unholy tendency to laughter" (*Anne of Green Gables* 130) over Anne's non-conformity informs our understanding of the complexity of Montgomery's faith journey and our reading of her well-loved novel *Anne of Green Gables* (1908). I argue that Montgomery's religious viewpoint(s) — private but societal, conflicting but reconcilable, iconoclastic but ultimately orthodox — provides the structure to *Anne of Green Gables*, not obtrusively but intrinsically, as a frame serves a picture or a skeleton the whole body. In particular, the symbiotic faith journeys of Marilla and Anne illustrate Montgomery's concept of a personal living faith that demasks the erroneousness of a formal religion informed by a too-rigidly-applied understanding of Puritanism.

Central to my argument is the interpretation of Montgomery as an ingeniously comic iconoclast who — in her art as in her life writing, if not as much in her social persona — challenges the interpretation of Christianity

offered by her Presbyterian denomination. As Mary Henley Rubio argues, Montgomery's Scottish-Presbyterian ethos of self-examination, which requires the democratic view of the individual's ability to critique and thus renew society, enables her to make "sport" ("L.M. Montgomery" 94) of "those whose practice of religion misses its spirit" (97).<sup>1</sup> Montgomery levels a powerful social criticism of the inadequate — if not false — icon (idol) of a truncated rational Christianity by juxtaposing Marilla's often rigid Puritanism with Anne's imaginative individualism, thus enveloping Marilla and the reader with a pervasive "unholy tendency to laughter" (*Anne* 130) that echoes Mark Twain's "unholy mirth" (46) in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876). With this ironic "unholy tendency to laughter," then, Montgomery shatters the idolatrous image of a socially restrictive and repressive Christianity in order to create an icon of or window on the intrinsic orthodoxy (rightness) of a profoundly vivid faith.

### L.M. Montgomery's Faith Journey: The Dream of "Orthodoxy"

The claim that L.M. Montgomery offers an icon of a profoundly "orthodox" faith in *Anne of Green Gables* may seem to be an astonishing one to make in view of the religious doubt she describes in her published journals. On the one hand, as Rubio argues, Montgomery is inseparable from her Scottish-Presbyterian identity, given that she is informed by socio-religious principles such as education, democracy, and self-examination, and given that she "remains a thinking and judging Presbyterian to the core, always studying herself and the wider human society to see how it might be improved" ("L.M. Montgomery" 100-01). On the other hand, this adherence to a cultural ethos informed by Christianity does not in and of itself constitute what many regard as essential Christianity — belief in the central creeds regarding sin, atonement, and redemption that results in a personal faith in Jesus as portrayed in the Judeo-Christian Bible that remains constant despite denominational variations.<sup>2</sup> In her published journals and correspondence, Montgomery frequently rejects central tenets of the Christian faith. In a 1905 letter to Ephraim Weber, she writes that she does not view the Bible "as a book inspired by God" but "as a book much of which is inspired with God" (*Green Gables Letters* [8 May 1905] 30). In a later letter dated the same year, she returns to this important topic:

I cannot accept the *divinity* of Christ. I regard him as immeasurably the greatest of all great teachers and as the son of God in the same sense that any man inspired of God is a son of God. . . . And possibly he may also stand as an emblem of man in his highest and yet-to-be-attained development. (*Green Gables Letters* [28 June 1905] 35)

In the same letter, she rejects "the Christian's heaven" as an overly

spiritualized concept of the afterlife (*Green Gables Letters* [28 June 1905] 38), although in an earlier journal entry she discovers “a pleasing conception” of heaven that she wishes she could believe in (*Selected Journals I* [7 Oct. 1897] 198). She admits how as a child she suffered from terrors of hell (*Selected Journals I* [7 Oct. 1897] 196) and later considers the doctrine of hell to be libel against God, a fiction emanating from evil human hearts (*Green Gables Letters* [8 Mar. 1909] 88). Similarly, she embraces science as the master-narrative that has ostensibly rendered Christianity obsolete, testifying to her faith in evolution as having “dealt the death blow to the old theology of Christ dying for Adam’s sin,” emphasizing that “If man rose up from a lower form, as all scientists now agree, there was no ‘fall’ and consequently no need of any ‘sacrifice’ to square God and man” (*Green Gables Letters* 35).

In 1908, Montgomery explains to Weber her religious dilemma:

I call myself a Christian, in that I believe in Christ’s teachings and do my poor best to live up to them. I am a member of the church believing that with all its mistakes and weakness it is the greatest power for good in the world and I shall always do what I can to help its cause. But oh, this hideous cant of “being washed in the blood.” To me that phrase always summons up a disgusting physical picture that revolts me. (*Green Gables Letters* [5 Apr. 1908] 67)

In later journal entries, this doubt grows (see, for example, *Selected Journals III* [29 Dec. 1921] 33-34, [4 May 1924] 182). These examples of Montgomery’s conscious and sometimes radical refutation of Christian tenets of faith may well jar with White’s claim that “she had a mature and balanced Christian faith” (84), one that was “orthodox . . . though differently expressed” (87). Given these examples, in what possible sense can White or this paper argue for Montgomery’s overall orthodoxy in any useful way, and what possible relevance might this have for *Anne of Green Gables*?

I would like to begin to address this problem by returning to the phenomenon of there being two Montgomerys living in contradiction. As Rubio explains, “Montgomery’s point of view is very complex and often unstable, and it changes at different points in her life. The Montgomery who writes the novels is often not the Montgomery who writes the journals” (“L.M. Montgomery” 97). In their introduction to the collection of essays *L.M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture* (1999), Irene Gammel and Elizabeth Epperly note Montgomery’s conservative attachment to the Presbyterian tradition (8-9) as well as the deep “ambivalence regarding . . . institutionalized religion” (10). Genevieve Wiggins describes her as a “freethinker in religion” who “played the role of an orthodox and dutiful minister’s wife” but who privately entertained rebellious thoughts hidden “behind a mask of conventionality” (1). Finally, Smith notes that “Her journals offer dark

portraits of Presbyterianism and despairing visions of a faith cherished but frankly disbelieved" (3). This painful contradiction between deep attachment to her Presbyterian heritage and a radical rejection of several of its essentials is unequivocally expressed in her own dim view of the very life that she ironically chooses as part of her decision to accept the marriage proposal of Ewan Macdonald, a Presbyterian minister:<sup>3</sup>

The life of a country minister's wife has always appeared to me as a synonym for respectable slavery — a life in which a woman of any independence in belief or character, must either be a failure, from an "official" point of view, or must cloak her real self under an assumed orthodoxy and conventionalism that must prove very stifling at times. (*Selected Journals* I [12 Oct. 1906] 321)

The question remains: is it reasonable to argue that a "stifled" or "enslaved" writer can espouse a Christian faith that she ostensibly opposes? Returning to the question of Montgomery's overall orthodoxy, White suggests that Montgomery "had a religious faith not unusual for her time and place" and, like "ordinary people" everywhere, was making "quiet adjustments" (87) to her faith. White's perspective suggests that the term "orthodoxy" should be regarded in the very broadest sense of the earnest seeker reinterpreting "mere" or essential Christianity minus accrued cultural and historical baggage from practiced or institutionalized Christianity. My own sense of Montgomery's "orthodoxy" shares White's conception of an earnest seeker hammering out her own creed — sifting the false from the true, thus reinventing a personally tenable faith — but it also considers that in her fiction she entertains *the possibility of orthodoxy* in the narrower sense of her heartfelt wish to discover the "kernel" of Christianity and to therefore experience, imaginatively, a vibrant personal faith (*Selected Journals* I [23 Nov. 1901] 271).<sup>4</sup> As she declares in a journal entry of 1897,

I am not "religiously inclined", as the phrase goes, but I have always possessed a deep *curiosity* about "things spiritual and eternal". I want to *find out* — to *know* — . . . what vital spark of immortal truth might be buried among all the verbiage of theologies and systems. (*Selected Journals* I [7 Oct. 1897] 196)

Similarly, in 1898, after reading Henry Sienkiewicz's bestseller *Quo Vadis* (1897), she records her esteem of the book's depiction of

the pure and awful beauty of early Christianity; the which, could it but have retained its primitive simplicity, instead of becoming overgrown with dogma and verbiage would be as potent a force today as it was when the martyrs of the Colosseum sealed their faith with their blood. (*Selected Journals* I [10 July 1898] 223)

This entry is followed by a joyous description of writing at the window of her “dear old room . . . [where] the window opens on a world of wonder and beauty” (223), a description that foreshadows the enthusiasm of *Anne of Green Gables*: the combined effect between her esteem of a literary depiction of early, “primitive” Christianity and her description of the outdoor world is suggestive of what she would later achieve in this novel. In *Anne and Marilla*, Montgomery offers an iconoclastic exploration of the idol of Cavendish Presbyterianism, a socially-constructed “orthodoxy,” in order to explore the possibility of a vibrant faith marked by enthusiasm or divine inspiration as the word implies, perhaps like the original orthodoxy or “rightness” of the early Christian church.

The purpose of this paper is to explore this competitive space between Montgomery’s conscious rejection, in her life writing, of Christianity (as frequently practiced by her denomination) and her emotional and imaginative (and, arguably, therefore also intensely reasonable) exploration of faith in *Anne of Green Gables*. Just as her novel creates the warm, secure world of childhood that she never herself experienced and redeems Anne and Marilla in ways that were never realized in her own life with Grandmother Macneill, so this novel, I argue, suggests a vivid portrait of what a genuine, living faith could look like. Like Anne’s Romantic view of the natural world, Montgomery offers a dream of faith “where we could drink of the wine of God’s sunshine in his eternal communion that knows no restrictions or creeds” (*Selected Journals I* [24 July 1899] 240). In other words, although Montgomery feared and inwardly rejected slavery to conventional Cavendish “orthodoxy,” at the same she longed to understand and experience what was at the heart of the “wise old myth” (*Selected Journals I* [30 July 1895] 307). In this sense at least, the Montgomery who writes the journals is indeed also the Montgomery who writes the novels: in *Anne of Green Gables*, perhaps as a wish-fulfillment, the conflicted author creates a dynamic image of faith. This conflicted Montgomery is, arguably, as un/orthodox as a Romantic individualist in rebellion against repressive authority who nonetheless offers a Platonic vision of the Good — the dream of a Christian spirituality worth having. To consider this further we need to review mis/readings of the Puritan heritage.

### *Anne of Green Gables*: Puritanism Revisited

*Anne of Green Gables* offers a rich inquiry into Canadian Presbyterianism at the turn of the twentieth century. As Muriel A. Whitaker reminds us, this society inherited the seventeenth-century Puritan ethic in which the child was regarded as a “brand of hell” (12) who needed to be taught by “exhortation, example, and punishment” in order to escape eternal damnation (13). It would be a misreading of Puritan thinking, however — even of

narrower Cavendish Presbyterian thinking and certainly of Montgomery's spirituality — to dismiss the Puritan heritage as one of "theological brutality" needing to be overthrown. Shirley Foster and Judy Simons invite this misreading in their argument that

*Anne of Green Gables* positions itself between two generic literary poles — the Evangelical representation of the sinful child who achieves redemption through self-discipline and obedience to Divine teaching, and the Romantic myth of youthful innocence whose entry into the adult world is a process of corruption and disenchantment. (169)

Hence they regard Anne in the role of "the pious child as moral instructor" who "overthrow[s] the dominant social and moral orders" (159) and Montgomery as "substitut[ing] alternative ethical priorities" (157) in reference to the author's claim that, in writing the novel, "I cast 'moral' and 'Sunday School' ideals to the winds and made my 'Anne' a real human girl" (*Selected Journals* I [16 Aug. 1907] 331). Similarly, in her introduction to *The Annotated Anne of Green Gables* (1997), Margaret Anne Doody argues that in this novel Montgomery moves away from her Presbyterian, Calvinist faith toward a "feminine religion" that emphasizes transcendence "within Nature" (23). While Montgomery certainly criticizes the moralizing of the established religious institution, this in itself is not evidence of a "substitute ethics" or dismissal altogether but instead could be regarded as well within the long tradition of individual voices, from the Hebrew Bible prophets to Jesus and subsequent religious thinkers, who seek to uncover and restore spirituality. Similarly, if Avonlea Presbyterians were thoroughly grim Puritans, they would not have opened their hearts to the "good and beautiful enthusiasms" of Rev. and Mrs. Allan "from the start" (170). And there is enough Christian substance in Anne's exploration of spirituality, echoes of the author's longing to uncover the "kernel" of original faith, that challenges the either/or Calvinist vs. Nature religion reading. Clearly, the familiar poles of religious thinking versus Romantic thinking need to be revisited because the Puritan heritage suggests a much richer spirituality than the grim image it is often associated with, including inherent emphases that are associated with Romanticism and feminist discourse.

The recent discourse of contemporary feminist theologians, for instance, destabilizes a monolithic reading of the Puritan legacy as one that brutally undervalues children. These revisionist theologians suggest instead that notable Puritans like John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards shared Montgomery's later celebration of children. Barbara Pitkin claims that "Calvin, the theologian of 'total depravity,' is more appreciative of the positive character of children, dwelling less on their sinfulness than some of his forebears (such as Augustine) or successors (such as Jonathan Edwards)" (169) because he regarded young children yet "unacquainted with the degrees

of honor, and with all the incentives to pride" (164) as "mature proclaimers of God's goodness" (166) and "mirrors of God's grace" (193). Catherine A. Brekus argues that Edwards "Undermined the traditional hierarchies of age and wealth" (317) by insisting that the "children of wrath" could also be reborn as "children of grace" (301) and that these children of grace could be superior to adults (317). It would be interesting to speculate how current feminist theological discourse might have informed Montgomery's religious vision(s) had she had the opportunity to join this conversation. Certainly, the Puritan emphasis on honouring childlike humility and regarding children as equal heirs of eternal life raised in this relatively recent discourse dovetails with the concerns Montgomery addressed a century or so ago. Thus, in addition to the stance of critical inquiry that Montgomery inherits from Scottish Presbyterianism, there is ample scope within the Puritan vision to critique adult failings through the eyes of a child. As Epperly notes, Montgomery was not a radical but chose to conform to her society, as does her heroine Anne (17), and I argue that the author's intention is not to overthrow Puritanism but to transform mediocre interpretations with a truer image. In other words, Montgomery's exploration of faith in *Anne of Green Gables* is not a rejection of Puritanism but a recovery of the biblical roots of Puritanism, not one of deposal and substitution but of restoration and redemption. In other words, *Anne of Green Gables* dramatizes the theology of grace and the importance of the childlike. As I will argue, Montgomery's "theology of grace" informs her critique of the commodification of children in this era.

Montgomery, then, offers a critical affirmation of Puritanism in *Anne of Green Gables*. The world of Avonlea is, as Rubio notes, "her beloved Cavendish, a typical tightly knit nineteenth-century Scottish community, with life organized around its church" ("L.M. Montgomery" 94). Montgomery's praise of Avonlea is echoed in her staunch affirmation of her own ancestors, described in her serialized memoir, *The Alpine Path: The Story of My Career* (1917): "Whatever were their faults, they were loyal, clannish, upright, God-fearing folk, inheriting traditions of faith and simplicity and aspiration" (18). However, the sanguine portrait of small-town life in *Anne of Green Gables* is nonetheless interlaced with a powerful social criticism leveled at the inadequate, if not false, icon of a truncated rational Christianity. As Rubio asserts, Montgomery is "a cleverly political writer" ("Subverting the Trite" 35) whose subversion of the traditional literary genre of domestic romance "embed[s] a counter-text of rebellion" (8) against patriarchal institutions, including Calvinistic Scottish Presbyterianism ("Satire" 28). Importantly, her achievement of cultural criticism through narrative is, as Rubio argues, linked to the Scottish-Presbyterian sense of agency in "constant self-examination through one's reasoning faculties" as well as a belief in the transformative power of imaginative story-telling ("L.M. Montgomery" 89). Montgomery is also a cleverly religious writer who



achieves her subversion of repressive, socially-constructed “orthodoxy” with a friendly hilarity that separates the life-killing rigid adherence to the letter of the law from the life-giving celebration of its spirit. Importantly, in Montgomery’s view, humour is the best means to restore a sense of the sacred: as she counsels G.B. MacMillan in 1906 on the power of humorous writing over “didactic or elevating” writing,

Of course, there are *some* things too sacred and lofty to be profaned by jesting. But there are many others that are not. In these cases the jest is directed *not* against the things themselves but against travesties and mockeries of them, pretences of them where the spirit is absent although the letter is fulfilled. I think such humor is wholesome in its effect, purging away what might else bring the truths these shams stand for into contempt. Of course, I do not think *anyone* should ever pen a joke that is tainted with immorality, venom, vulgarity or sacrilege. But for all other kinds of humor I have only the heartiest appreciation and I think that the writer of it is doing quite as much for humanity as if he wielded a more serious pen. Often times a truth can be taught by a jest better than by earnest. (*My Dear Mr. M.* [19 Mar. 1906] 20-21)

The “holiness” that Montgomery critiques in *Anne of Green Gables* should be understood as the cultural construction of Avonlea Presbyterianism; it is in fact a false “holiness” similar to Mrs. Lynde’s “holy horror” when she learns of Anne’s intentions to study Latin and Greek (304), and this false holiness is the subject of healthy laughter that can make room for a consideration of what may be truly sacred. That “unholy tendency to laughter,” then, is the power to critique the socio-religious environment in order to suggest the quest for genuine spirituality, the laughter that restores a sense of what may be truly holy. Importantly, in contrast to a postmodernist deconstruction that denies the existence of an objective sacred truth, Montgomery’s disabusement through “unholy . . . laughter” seeks to identify sacred truth — what a loving God might look like. In particular, she achieves this in exploring the symbiotic faith journeys of Marilla and Anne.

### *Anne of Green Gables: A World Transformed by Unholy Laughter*

Marilla Cuthbert may be regarded as the embodiment of the Avonlea understanding of Calvinistic Presbyterianism, one that espouses emotional restraint, serious-mindedness, hard work, and overall economy (see Wiggins 25) as the surest means to attaining what its citizens see as “humanity’s chief goal on earth [which is] to prepare for entrance into Heaven” (Rubio, “L.M. Montgomery” 100). Just as her Green Gables home is described as “painfully clean” (4), so she is at first “a woman of narrow experience and rigid conscience” (5), “frowning most resolutely” (29), and “always slightly distrustful of sunshine, which seemed to her too dancing

and irresponsible a thing for a world which was meant to be taken seriously" (4). Marilla behaves like a rational ascetic in her decision to dutifully adopt the nearly "perfect heathen" child (52) in order to undertake her religious education as well as in the way she "conceive[s] it to be her duty to drill Anne into a tranquil uniformity of disposition . . . into her model little girl of demure manners and prim deportment" (179). She thus attempts to repress emotion and spontaneity by criticizing Anne for "talk[ing] entirely too much for a little girl" (33) and disapproving of Anne's easy laughter and tears (54). Similarly, she distrusts imagination, instructing Anne to "never mind [her] imaginings" (32) and to "stick to bald facts" (38) as well as dismissing Anne's imaginative transformation of the commonplace wood into a haunted one as "wicked nonsense" (164). Likewise, she exhibits a narrowly Puritan dismissal of imaginative literature in seeing Anne's love of stories as foolish nonsense (210, 214).<sup>5</sup> Further, in ironic contrast to Anne's keen appreciation of the beauty of the natural world, Marilla rigidly insists that Anne wear "good, sensible, serviceable dresses, without any frills or furbelows about them," dismissing the child's attraction to pretty clothes as "pampering vanity" (78). Marilla espouses only what she deems to be "good" and "sensible" in thought and conduct. Even Rachel Lynde, the "capable" Presbyterian matron who is "the strongest prop of the Church Aid Society and Foreign Missions Auxiliary" (1), criticizes Marilla's narrowly rational approach to children:

there's no hard and fast method in the world that'll suit every child. . . . [F]lesh and blood don't come under the head of arithmetic and that's where Marilla Cuthbert makes her mistake. I suppose she's trying to cultivate a spirit of humility in Anne by dressing her as she does; but it's more likely to cultivate envy and discontent. (199)

And it takes what Mark Twain describes as "the dearest, and most lovable child in fiction since the immortal Alice" (*Green Gables Letters* [22 Dec. 1908] 80) to dismantle Marilla's staunchly serious Puritanism.

Anne Shirley, by contrast, is the imaginative, passionate, and "beauty-loving" (*Anne of Green Gables* 31) child who disrupts and transforms Marilla's narrowly rigid Puritan conscience. Similar to Wordsworth's child, in "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," who is Father of the man, and to Jesus's vision of the childlike heir to the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:2), Anne proves to be the child-saviour to Marilla: she becomes the Mother of the woman.<sup>6</sup> "All 'spirit and fire and dew,' as she was, the pleasures and pains of life [coming] to her with trebled intensity" (178), Anne is the foil to the emotionally repressed Marilla. She is the curious child who is only too glad to be alive just thinking about all the things there are to find out about (14). What appears to be mundane to many adults Anne invests with a childlike sense of wonder. Thus, a blooming white plum tree appears as "a bride all in white with a lovely misty veil" (13), an avenue of wide-spreading apple

trees becomes “the White Way of Delight” (18), and Barry’s Pond is re-named “the Lake of Shining Waters” (19). Her education is an intuitive one in which she easily delights in imagining herself to be a seagull (42) or a bee among the flowers (59). As Temma F. Berg points out, she teaches even Mrs. Lynde “to think in ‘flowery’ metaphors” (163). Anne always seeks deeply felt experience, and her imaginative identification of herself with nature only increases the intensity of her relation to God. On a frosty winter morning she voices her sense of a God who is the God of pleasure and aesthetics, a parallel to Montgomery’s resistance to the idea “that *religion* and *beauty* were antagonists” (*Selected Journals* I [7 Jan. 1910] 378): “Oh, Matthew, isn’t it a wonderful morning? The world looks like something God has just imagined for His own pleasure, doesn’t it?” (144). She is the flamboyant dreamer who easily “wave[s] . . . [Marilla’s pat] moral[s] inconsequently aside and seize[s] only on the delightful possibilities before [her]” (58). Her passionate presence challenges and reconstructs the overly rationalistic piety of Avonlea by an “instruction through delight.” In her capacity for awe, Anne introduces a thoroughly engaged, highly imaginative, and personal faith that becomes a revelation to Marilla and to Montgomery’s readers. When Marilla attempts to guide a rather “heathen” or ignorant Anne into what she considers acceptable Avonlea religious behaviour — “a tranquil uniformity of disposition” (179) emphasizing gravity, habit, and rote prayer — Anne disrupts Marilla’s apparently seamless view of faith with a Romantic perspective of an emotionally engaged and imaginative faith that challenges Marilla’s overly rational Puritanism. And while Marilla is the staid adult not easily “drawn from the safe concrete into dubious paths of the abstract” (84), who gets “thoroughly worn out trying to follow the gyrations of Anne’s thoughts” (76), and who ever seeks to quench Anne’s “spirit and fire and dew,” she is very much susceptible to the healing power of laughter that Anne inspires. This is what corrects her vision.

In true subversion of a patriarchal religion that emphasizes rationality at the expense of imagination, construes piety as an emotionally distant rather than an engaged activity, and assumes that pious, knowledgeable adults provide the map of salvation for sinful, ignorant children, Montgomery shows how the attempt to educate Anne becomes a delightful and ironic exercise in the deepening religious education of Marilla. Of this power of the child to transform adults, Perry Nodelman identifies a pattern in girls’ novels of this period where it is the “heroine’s magic ability to awaken dormant joyousness” (31) in the repressed adults, whereas Berg describes Anne’s power to effect change in others as “a subtle but revolutionary feminism which has empowered generations of young girls” (163). Doody, as noted above, speaks of a “feminine” spirituality. But Montgomery’s “feminine” religion has strong links with pillars of Puritanism like Calvin and Edwards, as we have seen, and Anne’s spirituality is de-

cidedly Christ-centred rather than pantheistic. Arguably, then, Montgomery recovers features of Christian faith that in Western thinking are frequently gendered as feminine.

At the beginning of the novel, Marilla unreflectively associates formal or legalistic religious behaviour with a genuine religious disposition. That is, she confuses a salvation that is achievable through conduct with the theology that salvation can only occur through grace. The strong tendency to this "works righteousness" theology is clear enough when Anne herself, elsewhere scolded as being "the very wickedest girl [Marilla] ever heard of" (100), often worries that she fails to be a model child (179), declaring that "No matter how hard I try to be good I can never make such a success of it as those who are naturally good" (180-81). In this context, Marilla feels "horrified astonishment" over Anne's announcement that she never says any prayers (49): "Don't you know it's a terrible wicked thing not to say your prayers every night? I'm afraid you are a very bad little girl"; she feels only some relief over Anne's ability to recite a catechismal definition of who God is in a disengaged manner (50). She hopes to correct Anne's religious ignorance by insisting that she memorize the Lord's Prayer and refrain from comments about what she feels and thinks about it (57). Similarly, after we are told that Marilla is "as fond of [inculcating] morals as the Duchess in Wonderland" (58), she offers insipid instructions: "If you'll be a good girl you'll always be happy, Anne. And you should never find it hard to say your prayers" (76). When Anne offers her first prayer, a spontaneous affair of the heart thanking God for such wonders as the White Way of Delight and expressing her longing for a home at Green Gables as well as beauty when she is grown up (51), we are told that "Poor Marilla was only preserved from complete collapse by remembering that it was not irreverence, but simply spiritual ignorance on the part of Anne that was responsible for this extraordinary petition" (51-52), and she later insists that "There's to be no more of such praying" (55). And so, the confidently legalistic Marilla sets out determined to teach this child whom she regards as "next door to a perfect heathen" (52), and in the process loses her own propensity to act as if religious legalism, as customary in Avonlea or perhaps defined by her own fear of Rachel Lynde's critical scrutiny, were the means of salvation.

It is no coincidence that Anne's most moving Christian meditation is her experience of the picture entitled "Christ Blessing Little Children," nor that the serious Marilla cannot comprehend her vivid experience. Indeed, the subversive nature of this gospel story itself is worth consideration:

And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought *them*. But when Jesus saw *it*, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little

child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put *his* hands upon them, and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16)

As various contemporary feminist theologians have argued, Jesus subverts the patriarchal social world that esteems economic power and rationality in favour of the celebration of childlike humility and weakness. In her introduction to the collection of essays *The Child in Christian Thought* (2001), Marcia J. Bunge notes the “radical” nature of Jesus receiving the children, identifying himself with them, and depicting them as models for adults at a time when children occupied such a low position in society (11). In her contribution to the same volume, Judith M. Gundry-Volf explores the “provocative” gospel teaching in which children are regarded “as recipients of divine insight and representatives of Jesus” (59), noting that Jesus “welcomed little children and did not privilege adults; rather, he privileged children and welcomed adults who became like children” (56). She emphasizes the challenge that this teaching poses — “the arrival of a social world in part defined by and organized around children” — and that Jesus “cast judgment on the adult world because it is not the child’s world” (60). The invitation Jesus offers children, Gundry-Volf concludes, is not an initiation into the adult world but into “what is *properly theirs* — the reign of God” (60). Arguably, in *Anne of Green Gables* Montgomery also echoes Jesus’s subversion of social and religious patriarchy in Anne’s and Marilla’s conflicting perspectives of this incident.

Anne has departed for the sitting room under Marilla’s strictest orders to learn the Lord’s Prayer by heart, to “obey” and to “not stand stock-still and discourse about it” (55). Marilla’s objective is to educate Anne into conformity to acceptable religious language in order to replace the sort of spontaneous prayer Anne offered in the previous scene. Marilla’s reductive attachment to a rational religion achieved by rote memory illustrates her single-minded and repressive adherence to a narrowly-defined patriarchal religion. When Anne fails to return, Marilla finds Anne “standing motionless before [the] picture . . . , with her hands clasped behind her, her face uplifted, and her eyes astar with dreams” (55-56). Moreover, Montgomery’s depiction of the natural world emphasizes the depth of Anne’s religious experience: “The white and green light strained through apple trees and clustering vines outside fell over the rapt little figure with a half-unearthly radiance” (56). Marilla, however, is oblivious to Anne’s deeply spiritual experience, and the child attempts to explain to the sharply demanding woman how she was imagining that she was the lonely and sad-looking girl in the blue dress, most likely also an orphan, hoping to be blessed by Jesus. Passionately, Anne narrates:

I’m sure I know just how she felt. Her heart must have beat and her hands must have got cold, like mine did when I asked you if I could stay. She was

afraid He mightn't notice her. But it's likely He did, don't you think? I've been trying to imagine it all out — her edging a little nearer all the time until she was quite close to Him; and then He would look at her and put His hand on her hair and oh, such a thrill of joy as would run over her! (56)

In this sequence, Montgomery illustrates Anne's quest for an engaged personal experience of God — the ultimate kindred spirit — and suggests that a faith worth having has everything to do with this capacity for imagination and wonder and fulfillment of the longing for intimacy. Significantly, Anne's childlike and emotional identification with the story echoes the sensibility of the Puritan Jonathan Edwards, who should not be associated with a repressive patriarchalism. As Catherine A. Brekus relates in her own contribution to *The Child in Christian Thought*, Edwards described his own relationship to God in terms of the helpless submission of a child: "I very often think with sweetness, and longings, and pantings of soul, of being a little child, taking hold of Christ, to be led by him through the wilderness of the world" (312). Importantly, Edwards also taught a new theology of "religious affections." As Brekus notes, "Unlike earlier Puritan ministers, who equated religion with a rational understanding of Scripture, Edwards claimed that true faith was a matter of the heart." He wrote: "Our people don't so much need to have their heads stored, as to have their hearts touched" (314). Likewise, Montgomery rejects the narrowly rationalistic concept of acquiring religious knowledge by rote memory (which Anne has some knowledge of from the start and acquires easily enough) and emphasizes instead the profundity of an emotional and imaginative experience of faith. As well, Anne's childlike exploration of faith is open, reflective, and questioning, such as when Mrs. Allan teaches Sunday School (170). So Anne ponders with a naive shrewdness that attempts to approach the reality of the historical Jesus: "I wish the artist hadn't painted Him so sorrowful looking. All His pictures are like that, if you've noticed. But I don't believe He could really have looked so sad or the children would have been afraid of Him" (56). But to Marilla, Anne's quest for an engaged, personal experience of God is as unfamiliar as the girl's desire for a "bosom friend" (57) and perpetual chatter about wishing for kindred spirits.

Clearly, for Montgomery, Anne is the childlike soul with "more scope for imagination" (10) who is closest to the kingdom of heaven. But Marilla, by contrast, is too often and by long habit the rational adult, much more rationalistic, in fact, than key Puritan forebears in her rejection of both the imagination and the capacity of the child to "mirror" the divine. Like the ignorant and rebuking disciples, Marilla cannot seem to apprehend the mystery of Anne's spirituality and rejects the girl's faith as "positively irreverent," insisting that "it doesn't sound right to talk so familiarly about such things" (56). All Marilla can think of doing is to curb Anne's chatter as she sends her from room to room to memorize the prayer. Positively fear-

ful of Anne's imaginative identification with the child portrayed in the picture as well as of open reflection about faith in general, Marilla is largely unable to grasp that *the childlike quest for familiarity with the divine is central to spirituality*. For the time being, Marilla remains oblivious to what *the reader discovers* — *that true and deeply transformative piety is an emotionally-engaged activity between the divine and the individual and that childlike faith opens onto a familiarity with and understanding of God that narrow adult rationality cannot comprehend*. For now, the gentle laughter that impresses this upon the reader has not yet reached Marilla's consciousness.

But to regard Marilla as merely the embodiment of Avonlea Calvinistic Presbyterianism would be to ignore her latent inner resistance to social conformity and her potential for change, exemplified in the amethyst brooch that is "plain" Marilla's "most treasured possession" (94) and in the fact that she is celebrated in Avonlea for her homemade currant wine (127). Thus, almost from the start there is a tension within Marilla between her serious perception of Puritan piety and her own powerful emotions and convictions. Although she is suspicious of emotion and awkward in its expression, Marilla is not rigidly ascetic to the core. It should be noted that in the beginning Marilla does not adopt Anne merely "out of a cold sense of duty," as Margaret Atwood suggests (225), but rather out of a profound sense of pity for her "starved, unloved life" (41) and an understated vision of becoming for Anne the human medium of God's love (51), which she gradually achieves. This sense of duty as the loving path to a full life is echoed in Anne's resolve, at the end of the novel, to stay in Avonlea as Marilla's companion (301-03). Moreover, for all of Marilla's angular severity, her dormant sense of humour threatens to erupt and transfigure her rigidity. Prior to Anne's impact, we are told that she "looked like a woman of narrow experience and rigid conscience, which she was; but there was a saving something about her mouth which, if it had been ever so slightly developed, might have been considered indicative of a sense of humor" (5). And in the course of the education Anne provides for Marilla, the reader often sees her trying to smother a smile (47), "rather rusty from long disuse" (24), and quench Anne's "chatter" when she "[finds] herself becoming too interested in it" (63). It is this undercurrent of healthy laughter, though deemed "unholy," that finally destabilizes and corrects Marilla's vision to what may be truly sacred, restoring her to well-being.

From the beginning, Marilla's dormant sense of humour conflicts with her decision to instigate "Anne's religious training" (50). When Anne follows Marilla's instructions to kneel in prayer, her assumed imitation of Avonlea religious gravity is undercut by a Romantic plea for genuine emotional engagement with the divine. Anne asks,

Why must people kneel down to pray? 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 the lovely blue sky that looks as if there was no end to its blueness. And then I'd just *feel* a prayer. (50-51)

Although Marilla rejects Anne's Romanticism, Anne's questioning approach causes Marilla to see the incongruity of imposing the simple classic prayer "Now I lay me down to sleep" on a love-starved orphan because she has "the glimmerings of a sense of humor — which is simply another name for a sense of the fitness of things" (51). It is this latent sense of humour that prevents Marilla from making the mistake of assuming that familiar religious language will be adequate for this orphan child's needs:

it suddenly occurred to her that that simple little prayer, sacred to white-robed childhood lispings at motherly knees, was entirely unsuited to this freckled witch of a girl who knew and cared nothing about God's love, since she had never had it translated to her through the medium of human love. (51)

Similarly, Marilla distinguishes between actual reverence and learned religious behaviour: after hearing Anne's personal prayer Marilla decides that the child's unusual language does not result from "irreverence" but from "spiritual ignorance" (52), as noted earlier. Later, when Anne returns Mrs. Lynde's emotional abuse with passionate rage, Marilla surprises herself by defending the child, realizing that she feels more social humiliation than sorrow over Anne's moral state (66), and as she recalls "Mrs. Rachel's dumfounded countenance" she feels mainly "a most reprehensible desire to laugh" (69). She is "dismayed at finding herself inclined to laugh over the recollection" of Anne's apology to Mrs. Lynde (75), just as she has to laugh over Anne's false confession over the matter of the brooch (104). Certainly, Marilla's laughter over Anne's artful confessions heightens her critical awareness of the lowly status of children in this society. When Mr. Phillips chooses to humiliate Anne as a "scapegoat" by ordering her to sit next to Gilbert Blythe (114), Marilla recognizes the injustice, though she is not yet prepared to challenge the status quo outright by admitting this to the child (117). But the iconoclastic laughter continues to widen Marilla's narrow vision.

Importantly, Anne's honest observations about adult religious hypocrisy educate Marilla toward distinguishing between social conformity to the appearance of reverence, perhaps best represented in Rachel Lynde's sharp tongue (she'd "pick faults in the Angel Gabriel himself if he lived in Avonlea," according to Marilla [214]), and the genuine, personal quest for faith that Anne shows. For example, when Anne complains about the Sunday School Superintendent's impersonal prayer (81) and the minister's unimaginative sermon (82), a thoughtful Marilla cannot reprove her be-



cause she recognizes that the child freely voices "those secret, unuttered, critical thoughts" that she herself had harboured for years but had not dared to acknowledge. Now the child celebrated by Jesus, "this outspoken morsel of neglected humanity," awakens the criticism that the adult had silenced (83), reminiscent too of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Emperor's New Clothes." But a lifetime of repression is not easily overcome. When Anne shrewdly diagnoses the "cold, sullen" Mrs. Barry (129) as an "obstinate person" whom "God Himself [cannot] do very much with" (130), Marilla still rebukes her, "striving to overcome that unholy tendency to laughter which she was dismayed to find growing upon her" (130). When Anne declares she would like to be a Christian if she could be the cheerful sort she sees in Mrs. Allan, unlike the melancholy one she associates with Mr. Superintendent Bell, Marilla reprimands her for naughtiness (171). However, although Marilla vigilantly strives against the growing tendency to unholy laughter within her, its force dismantles her adherence to a rigid interpretation of Puritanism. And when a maturer Anne confesses to feeling "desperately wicked" and "irresistibly tempted" to commit the very sins Rachel Lynde preaches against, wondering if she's "really bad and unregenerate" (252), Marilla finally laughs outright, dispelling the potential judgment by admitting that she feels the same way, and humorously suggests that "There should have been a special commandment against nagging" (251-52). In true symbiosis, Anne, the child, is now elevated to enjoying equal worth, and Marilla, the adult, submits to the liberation of childlike laughter.

With healing laughter, then, Montgomery paints a genuine icon of faith — a joyous, humane faith that honours the whole person. Certainly, she achieves this in Anne's deep spirituality. Anne is the child-saviour who points the way to God. Her faith is the map that helps Marilla and the reader out of the maze of legalistic religion. Although she begins life in Avonlea in a state of "spiritual ignorance" (52) or at least unfamiliar with many of the social norms for religious behaviour, she is most emphatically not primarily "a child of wrath" destined for hell, as some Puritans may have concluded, but "a child of grace," as other Puritans would have noted, one who grows in her faith and is an inspiration to Marilla and others. Anne as a gift of grace is emphasized by Matthew's pronouncement: "She's been a blessing to us. . . . It was Providence, because the Almighty saw we needed her, I reckon" (277). And in keeping with her early vision of connection with Jesus, Anne is never dissuaded from personal heartfelt prayer. Unlike adults concerned with social appearance and the dynamics of power, Anne is the spiritually mature child who intuitively knows what prayer must mean. Wisely, and early on, Anne counters Marilla's easy moralizing by insisting that "Saying one's prayers isn't exactly the same thing as praying" (76), and Marilla's silence over Anne's insight affirms the validity of the living faith that Anne exercises. Later, Anne's intense happiness upon being re-

stored into Mrs. Barry's good graces is punctuated by her desire "to think out a special brand-new prayer in honor of the occasion" (147). Her reaction to winning first place in her examinations overflows into a genuine reverence as a "murmured . . . prayer of gratitude and aspiration that came straight from her heart" and is followed by "dreams . . . as fair and bright and beautiful as maidenhood might desire" (264). And her quotation of a poem by Robert Browning in the concluding line of the novel, "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world" (308), seals her journey from the lonely orphan seeking wellness to confidence in its abiding presence.

Montgomery also achieves a true icon of faith in the liberation of Marilla. She begins as the severely rational woman who is as equally suspicious of emotion as she is of sunshine, first challenging Matthew with the utilitarian view of children typical of that time — "What good would she be to us?" (28) — and then requiring that Anne prove to be "a useful little thing" (47). It is noteworthy that this utilitarianism reflects, as Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore argues, the capitalist ideology in which "children are seen as either possessions or impediments to economic progress" rather than the Christian view in which "Children are named gifts of God that promise delight, bewilderment, and enlightenment" (464). The miracle of Anne, however, is how she catalyses this transformation of Marilla. Indeed, the old disciplinarian who once declared that "All I want is that you should behave like other little girls and not make yourself ridiculous" (85) and who would never have "believed that she really liked Anne much better as she was" (179) becomes the maternal woman cherishing the imaginative child who is like a "dancing sunbeam in one of the brook shallows" (179). A capitalist commodification of children disappears; Puritan pragmatism gives way to a slow conversion to Anne's taste for pretty dresses and a wistful wondering about what has become of her "chatter" and her story club (252-55). The reader witnesses Marilla growing softer and mellower with the years, less successful in repressing unholy laughter. Not only does she laugh heartily over Anne's actions and insights in private, but she concedes to Anne's discernment overall, and the power of a rigid asceticism diminishes. The once repressed Marilla emerges as a passionate woman who, in her grief over the death of Matthew, is finally able to warmly declare her love for Anne:

Oh, Anne, I know I've been kind of strict and harsh with you maybe — but you mustn't think I didn't love you as well as Matthew did, for all that. I want to tell you now when I can. It's never been easy for me to say things out of my heart, but at times like this it's easier. I love you as dear as if you were my own flesh and blood and you've been my joy and comfort ever since you came to Green Gables. (296)

In parenting Anne, then, Marilla undergoes a significant spiritual discipline and renewal, because, as Beverly Harrison notes, children have "a

formidable power” that “draws the [adult] into being” (qtd. in Miller-McLemore 464). Kathryn Rabuzzi speaks of the sacredness of motherhood, saying that to be a mother is “to be ‘graced’” (qtd. in Miller-McLemore 470). Certainly, Marilla’s unexercised heart expands to healthy dimensions through nurturing Anne. Her considerable fear that intense human love is sinful (238-39, 277) begins to somewhat approximate C.S. Lewis’s insight that “It is probably impossible to love any human being simply ‘too much,’” that the problem lies rather in “the smallness of our love for God,” and the solution suggests itself in increasing love overall (112). The more mature Marilla looks rather much like the woman that the Apostle Paul insists is saved through her child (I Timothy 2:15). And, as Atwood observes, the novel “is about Marilla Cuthbert becoming a good — and more complete — woman” who regains her capacity for love (225). And so, through the iconoclastic laughter that Anne’s earnest quest for faith awakens in the older woman, Marilla embarks on a faith journey that leads her out of flat legalism mixed with reductionist capitalism to a deeply humane spirituality characterized by love. Marilla, together with Matthew, fulfills the vision of Christian charity that Matthew articulated in rejection of commodification: “We might be some good to her” (29).<sup>7</sup> Most surprisingly to herself, Marilla is at last a “kindred spirit” converted by love to its celebration.

### Conclusion

What this paper has attempted to demonstrate is the extent to which Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* is a considerable achievement in comic iconoclasm. With the healing laughter that she cites as a most powerful tool to undo false religion (*My Dear Mr. M.* [19 Mar. 1906] 20-21), Montgomery dethrones the idol of an overly rational Christianity in order to offer instead a compelling window on or icon of a vibrant faith that is informed by passion, imagination, and wonder. We may read her work as a recovery of the biblical roots of Puritanism and therefore a critical affirmation of the “kernel” or intrinsic orthodoxy (rightness) of her own Cavendish Presbyterianism as imaginative possibility. In this iconoclasm, Montgomery notably subverts the wrongfully repressive patriarchal world of economics and rationality with a celebration of childlike spirituality that has strong links with Romanticism and feminist discourse. Marilla no longer regards Anne as an economic possession or as a lesser being requiring legalistic religious didacticism but as a gift who embodies a map to God. Readers love Anne because she is a child-saviour who changes things, liberating hearts and minds with a socially “unholy” but truly sacred laughter that rings with faith, hope, and love. So Montgomery helps repair what Brekus criticizes as one of the failings of the Christian church: the not-yet-fulfilled need “to create a Christian theology that values children’s spiritual needs

. . . [based on] the best promises of the Christian faith — a faith built on Jesus’s love for the oppressed, the forgotten, and the very young” (328). These are some of the features of the dream of Christian faith that Montgomery suggests in *Anne of Green Gables* — the quest for the divine as the ultimate kindred spirit.

## Notes

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the L.M. Montgomery and Life Writing International Conference, University of Prince Edward Island (2002).

- 1 Montgomery’s celebration of an imaginative, holistic faith invites comparison with another Scottish influence, the nineteenth-century writer and former minister George MacDonald (1824-1905), who rejected the espoused orthodoxy of his Congregationalist church that emphasized warnings of damnation to the apparent exclusion of teaching about God’s love. In his lifelong imaginative quest for and unwavering faith in a loving God, MacDonald explored childlike spirituality as the key to genuine faith in his children’s fantasies *At the Back of the North Wind* (1882) and the *Princess* novels (1872, 1882). His work suggests parallels with Montgomery’s own vision in *Anne of Green Gables*.
- 2 The argument for an essential or “mere” Christianity that is defined by core beliefs, such as those agreed upon in the Apostle’s and the Nicene Creeds, is posed by C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* (1952). The intent, as explained by Lewis, is to focus on the core beliefs held by many throughout the ages apart from denominational variation.
- 3 The split vision of Montgomery as she wrestles with her own adherence to socio-religious rationalism and her conflicting passionate nature is evident when she rejects the man she loves, Herman Leard (*Selected Journals* I [8 Apr. 1898] 208-21), and later marries a socially respectable minister for whom she feels little.
- 4 I recognize that the term “orthodoxy” is necessarily troublesome, nor could it be otherwise. Given the spectrum of Christianity with its many theological positions and ongoing discussion as to what would constitute “correct teaching,” it would seem to border on impudence or naiveté to speak as if there were such a thing as “orthodoxy” in any useful way. The trouble always seems to be that any one cultural institution or socio-religious group subsumes the term for itself to the exclusion of all others. However, if we consider orthodoxy as a quest for understanding the original convictions, understandings, and experiences of the early Christian church, a quest that would attempt to sift through layers of cultural mis/representation to arrive at the original Christian faith, then we are, I think, in line with Montgomery’s heartfelt wish to discover the “kernel” of Christianity.
- 5 It should be emphasized that this suspicion of literature within Puritanism represents only one perspective in a heritage that has fostered richly imaginative writers like John Milton and John Bunyan.
- 6 Margaret Anne Doody also argues that Anne mothers Marilla and offers an important discussion of the meanings of the various female names that Montgomery chooses, pointing to the Catholic tradition where the mother of the Virgin Mary is St. Anne (26-27).
- 7 Matthew Cuthbert’s “sudden and unexpected” charitable insight towards Anne, which Marilla heatedly dismisses (“I believe that child has bewitched you!” [29]), arises out of the socio-historical context where children generally are undervalued and orphans in particular are exploited as unpaid servants, as Anne’s prior experience as well as the prospect of adoption by Mrs. Blewett illustrate. And while Marilla soon overcomes the tendency to commodify Anne, it is sobering to see that this charity does not extend to those outside Anglo-Presbyterian Avonlea, as for example the French Catholic citizens in the text. So Marilla speaks of “those stupid, half-grown little French boys” (6), echo-

ing Montgomery's own exclusivist language (see *Selected Journals* I [16 May. 1909] 349), and declares Anne's anodyne liniment flavoured cake as not "fit for any human to eat, not even [stupid, half-grown little French boy] Jerry Buote" (177), whereas Mary Joe's apparent incapacity to think or act during the episode in which Minnie May Barry contracts the croup seems too readily enumerated with her French identity (142).

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