

Telling and Retelling: L.M. Montgomery's Storied Lives and Living Stories

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Résumé: Le cas de L.M. Montgomery montre à quel point notre vie et les histoires que nous aimons sont intimement liées. Son journal présente de nombreux exemples de cette relation complexe entre vie et fiction. En effet, l'auteur a pu assumer son existence et lui conférer un sens en transformant les événements vécus en œuvres littéraires. Le récit du "journal" de l'oncle Jesse, repris dans un des volumes de la série d'*Anne aux pignons verts* témoigne de cette lente maturation à la fois existentielle et littéraire.

Summary: L.M. Montgomery illustrates the ways in which stories and lives are interwoven: we possess favourite stories by reading and rereading them, by acting them out, by revising or retelling them. We possess our lives by "storying" them, recursively, the way we read, as Montgomery does explicitly in her journals. In particular, as she retells her writing career, we become increasingly aware of the extent to which she incorporates her early experiences into her later successes. In fact, Montgomery persistently reworks material, recycling her own and others' experiences, her journals and scrapbooks, her reading and her own writing. The example of "The Life-book of Uncle Jesse" (published in 1909, and woven into *Anne's House of Dreams* in 1917) illustrates both the complex ways in which lives are stories and stories, lives and also the anxiety underlying all the recycling of literary material: the fear that literary invention is not a renewable resource. (This paper was written for delivery at the first L.M. Montgomery Symposium at the University of Prince Edward Island in 1994; it has been revised, but we asked Susan Drain to keep her personal approach and tone.)

Once upon a time, a kind person gave a book of stories to a departing friend — and thereby hangs a tale. The kind person was Rea Wilmshurst; the book, *Against the Odds*; the friend, me. I freely confess that I've never felt much at home among Montgomery fans and scholars. In fact, I sometimes call myself a Montgomery alien, although I read all the *Anne* books when I was a girl, and I've been teaching *Anne of Green Gables* for a number of years. In class, I discovered that I had things to say about *Anne*, so I wrote and published some essays — and I don't seem to have finished yet. But I felt no need to make the acquaintance of Emily or Pat or Marigold or Jane, or any of the myriad heroines "akin to Anne."

When Rea began editing her collections of stories, I ignored them too — until she put *Against the Odds* into my hands. I might not have sought a new acquaintance, but I am not so ungracious as to snub one. I read those stories with the pleasure that exists in the tension between familiarity and novelty, when the reader walks the wire strung between the here-and-now of reality and the somewhere else of fiction, exploring the tracery of a larger experience comprehending both. There was another familiarity, too, *déjà vu*, a flickering recognition that this "somewhere else of fiction" is a place I've visited before. A Montgomery alien, I have said, but perhaps not so alien after all.

I told you that I avoided the acquaintance of Emily *et al*; I even more resolutely refused the acquaintance of Maud. I didn't want to read the biographies and the letters and the journals. Only recently — since I bought a house from another Maud, and made myself at home in its rooms and garden — have I cared to open a door into Maud Montgomery's life. Of course, we can't really open a door; we open a book, or we listen to the stories of those who knew her.

Is there any reader who willingly imagines she is Diana?

Lives make stories, after all, and stories, lives: that is why I am storying my way into this exploration of these interconnections.

(I like to use "story" as a verb: it is highly limiting, in my view, to have to choose between "telling" and "reading" (or "hearing") stories. Print is a wedge that has split apart telling and reading, when they are really words as inextricable as "imply" and "infer" or "teach" and "learn" — different ends of the same stick, if you like.)

When I am teaching/learning *Anne of Green Gables*, I am always fascinated by the students' comments about their encounters with Anne. They have just finished reading *Tom Sawyer*, and they invariably remark upon Tom's acting out of stories, his retelling of them with increasing freedom: directing Robin Hood according to the script, hamming the throes of first love, improvising pirate games, and ultimately living the ancient legend of the Labyrinth. They point, too, to Anne's enacting Elaine. Those who were early readers of *Anne* sometimes confess that they acted out the novel. Montgomery borrowed from story, too:

When I was a schoolgirl of fifteen, I had a mania for writing 'ten year letters' — which being interpreted means a letter, 'written, signed, and sealed,' to be opened and read ten years from the date of writing. I don't know exactly where I got the idea — I think I'd read something like it in a "Pansy" book. At any rate I adopted it for my own, for it seemed so fine and romantic. (Oct. 18, 1900; *SJ I*: 253-54)

Bulwer Lytton's *Zanoni*, however, was her favourite:

Zanoni entered largely into my childish life. I was always *living* it — reconstructing parts of it to suit my wishes. Sometimes I was 'Viola' — but not the Viola of the book. ... Just as often I was not "Viola" but myself — ... the first woman who ever 'passed the ordeal.' (Feb. 18, 1924; *SJ III*: 166)

Story, we conclude, is not how we escape from our lives, nor is it just how we understand them; it is how we live them, rehearsing roles and becoming characters, identifying and imitating, internalizing and eventually improvising upon the structures: "I have read no book which influenced my inner life as did *Zanoni*" (Feb. 18, 1924; *SJ III*: 166).

My students are not the only ones that lived *Anne of Green Gables*. The cousin who first lent me an old copy of *Anne* also initiated a game of Green Gables that we played out in the blueberry plains around her house, in the meadows below my grandmother's, and in letters exchanged long after that summer visit was over. I never really enjoyed the game as much as I wanted to, but it is only recently that I realized why: because she, who had introduced me to the book, claimed precedence and the character of Anne for herself. I, therefore, had to be

Diana, and Diana is surely a poor second-best. Is there any reader who willingly imagines she is Diana? I always thought this grudging acceptance of my role a peculiar fault, best kept secret, till I came across an article about Montgomery in Poland. The author wrote of Polish girls:

Many more girls prefer to be like Anne than to have a friend who would resemble her.... *Thinking that they themselves are Anne, they do not want to share Anne's qualities with anybody. One of them says, 'You cannot be Anne because I am Anne. I would like to have a girlfriend but she would have to be like Diana.'* (Wachowicz 15, emphasis added)

There is much to explore in this oxymoron of the unique, indeed, exclusive, everygirl, but it is another paper. To this day, however, I attribute my being a Montgomery alien to the fact that my cousin staked a prior claim on Anne. It has taken me more years than I care to remember to come to the book on my own terms.

There was one other aspect to my first experience of Anne that I think is germane to my theme of telling and retelling. The copy that my cousin lent me had lost its last four pages: I had to ask her to tell me how it turned out. No wonder I had trouble claiming the book for myself! She was joint author; on her authority alone depended my sense of closure. I think I was always a little sceptical of her ending, until I saw it for myself. I remember considering the possible alternatives, though I don't remember working any of them out. Was I even then sophisticated enough to resist closure? I doubt it, but I do think that it is partly because my first experience of Anne was open-ended, that I haven't finished with her yet.

In this I was different from Alice Munro, who speaks of rewriting the conclusion of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* because she couldn't bear its terrible ending. "I remember walking around and around in the yard, when I was very small, making up that ending" (Ross 21). Montgomery rewrote parts of *Zanoni*, making sure that Zanoni's child would not be left alone in the world (Feb. 18, 1924; *SJ III*: 166). Rewriting was not, however, always necessary for Munro, Montgomery, or for most of us, either, I dare say. Rereading suffices. Munro again:

With a story that I loved, I would go back and read it over and over again. It was a desire for possession. I guess it was like being in love. (Ross 21-22)

Montgomery used a different metaphor:

[The books in the bookcase] are all my pets. I never buy a book unless I have read it before and know that it will wear well.... There are the poets I love and the ... stories I read in my teens — and have a liking for yet — and novels picked up here and there as opportunity offered, and which have been read and re-read, loaned and re-loaned until they are almost worn out ... (June 7, 1900; *SJ I*: 251-252)

Rereading is a way to recapture one's old self and to mark the difference between that self and the present. At 30, Montgomery reread a book that had been her mother's and was one of her own Sabbath standbys:

Probably it helped to form what good there is in my character ... I must keep that little red book forever. The child I was haunts every page and story of it. (Dec. 10, 1905; *SJ I*: 312)

Sometimes the book is visibly haunted:

I've always had the habit of marking my books [wrote Montgomery in 1905]. I do it now with pencil. I was not so wise in my teens and used ink. Consequently I cannot now erase the marks of passages and opinions I no longer agree with, and they stare me in the face as reminders of my sentimental 'salad days.' (Feb. 8, 1905; *SJ I*: 303)

Some books serve as a touchstone: Montgomery read and reread Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883).

It made a tremendous sensation when it came out over thirty years ago. It would not make any now... I found myself disagreeing with a good many passages I had marked in agreement formerly. But in regard to many I could draw a second score of intensified agreement. (Oct. 29, 1925; *SJ III*: 258)

An early nineteenth-century fairy tale, Baron de la Motte Fouqué's *Undine* (1811), was another book that Montgomery returned to again and again. "It was delicious," she declared on first reading in 1889, particularly because she was reading it under the lid of her school desk when she should have been reading history (Oct. 24, 1889; *SJ I*: 3). Eleven years later she found its charm "every whit as potent as when, years [before], behind that old brown desk in the little white schoolhouse, it [had] lured [her] into By-path Meadow and opened a world of fancy to [her] delighted eyes" (Oct. 7, 1900; *SJ I*: 253). Books she had known in childhood, she wrote once, were tinged "with the hues of [her] own life as [she] lived it" (July 11, 1909; *SJ I*: 357). They were not, however, always pleasant hues. In 1914, she wrote about the interpenetration of story and dream: reading *Undine* had once vividly brought back a twenty-year old nightmare she had forgotten; another time, a dream had brought back a story she had read even earlier (Jan. 10, 1914; *SJ II*: 142). At the end of 1927, she re-read *Undine* again:

What is there in books like this that never grows old or stale? Yet it is the simplest tale. And fairy tale at that, which the modern world sneers at. But we all need some kind of fairy tale else we cannot live. (Dec. 31, 1927; *SJ III*: 362)

Montgomery recorded a "solemn vow" made when she first finished *Undine*, a vow "that some day in the bright beautiful future — I was so sure *then* that it would be bright and beautiful — I would get the book for myself" (Oct. 7, 1900; *SJ I*: 253). Eventually she did, but owning one's own "dearest edition" (Oct. 7, 1900; *SJ I*: 253) or tinging one's reading with one's own life hues is not the only kind of possession. Alice Munro remembers:

I could not possess [a beloved story] *enough*, so I made up my own story that was like it... The reading itself just was not enough. It's hard for me to understand how people, who love reading as much as I did, stop with reading. I would think everybody would then start making up their own stories. (Ross 22)

This is how Montgomery began, too. She tells us she "cannot remember ever learning to read" (Jan. 4, 1900; *SJ I*: 247), and also,

I cannot remember the time when I did not mean to be a writer "when I grew up." (March 21, 1901; *SJ I*: 258)

"One wonderful day" she put them together: "When I was nine years old, I discovered that I could write poetry. I had been reading Thomson's *Seasons*, of

which a little black, curly-covered atrociously printed copy had fallen into my hands. So I composed a 'poem' called 'Autumn' in blank verse in imitation thereof" (*Alpine Path* 53). It was, she recalled, not "hampered by facts."

At the same age — "a tot of nine" she called it from the maturer perspective of an almost fifteen-year-old — she began to keep a diary. It was another case of life acting out story, for she first got the idea from reading *A Bad Boy's Dirty* [sic], lent her by the schoolteacher who boarded with her family.

I read it and re-read it and promptly began a "dirty." I folded and cut and sewed four sheets of foolscap into a book and covered it with red paper. On the cover I wrote "Maud Montgomery's Dirty [sic]." (May 12, 1902; *SJI*: 281)

It was very dull, said the almost fifteen-year-old, after she burned it, resolving that only things worth writing about would henceforth find a place in her journals. "Life is beginning to get interesting for me" (Sept. 21, 1889; *SJI*: 1), she said, and prepared a new book of and for it.

Whether or not, like Montgomery, we keep a journal to record the accounts of our lives, it is my contention that we all story our lives, recursively, the way we read. That is, we frame the present by anticipating what lies ahead, and by referring to the past, to construct a coherent account. An entry on New Year's Eve, 1898, demonstrates the process. Montgomery remarked:

The last day of the old year ... is surely the time of all times for 'journalizing.' People generally do a little raking over their inner consciousness at this time, as well as making more or less of good resolutions for the coming year. (Dec. 31, 1898; *SJI*: 228)

In other words, as the narrator of *Adam Bede* says, the story pauses a little, so that we can from time to time recapitulate and assess before continuing.

I'm going to write out the details of my quiet humdrum life this winter simply and solely for my own amusement. I enjoy this writing down my impressions of life and things as I go, even in my narrow orbit, and reading them over afterwards to compare them with newer ones. (April 4, 1899; *SJI*: 235)

The retrospect is not always enjoyable:

At present, I am looking backward and in all truth I cannot say that the record of '98 is one on which it pleases me to look — far from it! I am taking one glance over its blistered pages before I turn my back on it forever. (Dec. 31, 1898; *SJI*: 228)

Storying is prospective as well as retrospective: like some other girls, Montgomery indulged in the exercise of writing up her ideal wedding, though she knew even as she did that the "conventionalities" would not allow her to exchange unwitnessed vows with her beloved at sunrise in the heart of some great wood. At least, she swore, "if I ever do marry I will *not* be married under an 'arch' of tortured spruce boughs, decorated with pink and white tissue paper 'roses' and looking like nothing that God ever thought about! (Dec. 24, 1905; *SJI*: 313).

A curious example of the use of the journal to revise a past prospective (or to reconcile anticipation and reality) is found in a passage about the ten-year letters I mentioned much earlier.

Now, when the reading of these letters is falling due, it does not bring me the pleasure I once anticipated. Instead, I have an uncanny feeling, as if I were reading a letter from a ghost or across a grave. They give me far more pain than pleasure.

This evening, at eight o'clock, I had to open one of these epistles written ten years ago in ... Prince Albert by Edith Skelton. I remember very clearly the night we wrote them. We had been having a gay time as usual, for Edith was such a jolly girl. And we wrote those letters very light heartedly, never doubting that our friendship would outlive the years. It has not done so — it has just dropped away. I haven't heard from or of Edith for six years. I wonder if she remembered to open my letter tonight.

I opened her letter and read it. It was a merry letter, full of our old jokes, some of which I have so entirely forgotten that their significance is quite lost for me. It was not a brilliant epistle at all — Edith's talents did not lie in the direction of letter writing; and all things considered it was not worth keeping for ten years to read it. (Oct. 18, 1900; *SJ I*: 253-54)

Montgomery writes elsewhere, and more positively, of another girlish letter full of long-forgotten jokes.

This evening, reading over a packet of old letters, I came across a very old one written to my mother in her girlhood by a girl friend. I found it a few years ago in a box of old letters and have kept it among my treasures ever since. It gives me such a delightful *realization* of my mother — that girlish letter full of old jests and allusions at whose meaning I can only guess.

It is a dreadful thing to lose one's mother in childhood! I know that from bitter experience. How often, when smarting under some injustice or writhing under some misunderstanding, have I sobbed to myself, 'Oh, if mother had *only* lived!'

But quick on the heels of that wish always came the instinctive thought, 'But, oh, if she were like Aunt Emily, or even like Aunt Annie, that would only make it worse.' Even in childhood I realized that *that* would have been for me a worse tragedy than her death. (Jan. 2, 1905; *SJ I*: 300)

Edith's letter prompts Montgomery to write Edith out of her life; the letter to her mother, on the other hand, leads Montgomery to imagine what life would have been like had her mother not been removed from the story so early.

As I have said, the journal is not a simple current account, nor is it a palimpsest, its revisions and previsions overwritten but still decipherable. The earliest blank book volumes were recopied into legal ledgers, "exactly as ... written" (she claimed) but without the originals for comparison, we cannot be sure (*SJ I*: xxiv). The journal editors point out, also, that "several pages of the handwritten volumes were cut out and replacements just as carefully inserted" (*SJ I*: xxiv). That is, though sometimes Montgomery is content to close the book on a blistered page, sometimes it is cut out, and even rewritten to ensure coherence between the past and an unanticipated present. "For instance, in the entry in which she first described her future husband..., she removed the page and inserted a replacement" (*SJ I*: xxiv). Though not as drastically as in the burning of the first diary, the journals were censored after being written, and from time to time we become aware of omissions *during* the writing.

For example, we read suddenly that "Ewan Macdonald has called to say goodbye ... And I am sitting here with his little diamond solitaire on my left hand!" (Oct. 12, 1906; *SJ I*: 320). He had been minister for three years, but his name appears in the journals (the published ones, at least) only once in that period. The same kind of thing occurs eight years earlier, when Montgomery catches up several months of living in Bedeque in one entry, concluding with

Well, this is all — and yet it is ‘the play of Hamlet with Hamlet left out.’ Perhaps some day I may write it once again with Hamlet in — and perhaps I shall never feel that I can! (Jan. 22, 1898; *SJI*: 204)

Three months later, in another catching-up session, she announces “Now for ‘Hamlet’ with Hamlet in!” (April 8, 1898; *SJI*: 208) and reveals her passion for Herman Leard.

It is a complex moment: the journal reminds us that it is not an account of a life, but a recounting of it, and that there may be more than one way for the teller to reckon the accounts. In fact, it insists on the point. Flagging the Herman story as a “Hamlet” not only reveals that there is a public and a private story of Montgomery’s Bedeque days, but also alerts us to the fact that the private story we are about to read is a crafted story, a made thing, a fiction. I am not claiming that the Herman episode of Montgomery’s life is a fantasy or invented, but I am pointing out that we are given a remarkably coherent account of it, not day-by-day as it occurs, but “from beginning to end” (April 8, 1898; *SJI*: 208), she says, thereby claiming some closure, however temporary.

She is given to these retrospective accounts; another is a literary stock-taking in 1901, which identifies the “landmarks” of her literary development (March 21, 1901; *SJI*: 258). This entry is only one of the accounts we have of her growth as a writer, and it is instructive to compare it to the more elaborate account in *The Alpine Path* written when she was a highly successful author (1917; 1975), and also to the sketchy account in the journal of her achievements as they occur.

Montgomery begins *The Alpine Path* with incredulous amusement, an attitude similar to the disingenuous comment she makes as she begins the account of her engagement to Ewan Macdonald: “No one could be more surprised than I!” In *The Alpine Path*, she wonders whether her “long, uphill struggle, through many, quiet, uneventful years, [could] be termed a ‘career’” (9). To accommodate the whim of the editor, however, as she has learned assiduously to do, she agrees “cheerfully [to] tell my tame story” (9).

Tame it may be, but it is a careful as well as a cheerful telling, drawing upon the journal stock-taking of 1901 for whole sentences and paragraphs, revising some, adding new material, and deleting part.

Both accounts begin with her declaration that she could not remember “the time when I was not writing, or when I did not mean to be an author” (*Alpine Path* 52). The 1901 account lists her literary landmarks, moving straight to “the very first commendation my writing ever received” (March 21, 1901; *SJI*: 258) and thence to her first publication. The 1917 account, “the story of her career,” however, fills in far more of the landscape of activity out of which the landmarks rise.

She tells of her earliest “indefatigable” scribbling, and now, at the age of forty-three, she allows herself a passing sigh for the destruction she had carried

Lives make
stories, after
all, and sto-
ries, lives

out at almost-fifteen: "stacks of manuscripts, long ago reduced to ashes, alas, bore testimony to [my scribbling]. I wrote about all the little incidents of my existence (*Alpine Path* 52). She then writes about her discovery of poetry (in imitation of Thomson's *Seasons*) as well as her first commendation for it. To the description of her attempts to get published, she adds in *The Alpine Path* the original of the Story Club, "a little incident of schooldays when Janie S—, Amanda M—, and I all wrote a story with the same plot. I remember only that it was a very tragic plot, and the heroines all were all drowned while bathing on Cavendish seashore! Oh, it was very sad!" (59). This detail, not mentioned in 1901, reaches outside the narrative of her career in affirmation of her ultimate success, much as, less subtly, in 1901 she had commented, after telling of one rejection:

I may remark just here that one day last fall I took the plot of that identical story, wrote it up, sent it off, and took first prize in a story competition. But needless to say it was entirely unlike its former incarnation. (March 21, 1901; *SJI*: 261)

These two references to successes outside the chronological sequence highlight the difference between the two accounts, the earlier concerned more with how far the writing has outstripped its former incarnations, the later, concerned with how the writing includes the earlier experiences.

Both accounts introduce the early publication success in identical terms: "By this time my long-paralyzed ambition was beginning to recover and lift its head again" (*SJI*: 260; *Alpine Path* 58). A series of rejections had so mortified her that she no longer submitted anything for publication, though she continued to write "because I couldn't help it" (*SJI*: 260). Neither of these two accounts, however, fully explores the extent to which the story of her career includes earlier experiences. For that, we have to contrast the retrospective accounts with the journal entries of the particular events.

The retrospective accounts give the following details: her first success, she says, was her version in rhyme of the Cape Leforce legend which appeared in the Charlottetown *Patriot*. (*Alpine Path* 58). This was in November 1890 (*SJI*: 35). Other verses and articles followed this one into print, among them the story of the wreck of the *Marcopolo*, in the *Montreal Witness* (*Alpine Path* 59).

The Cape Leforce legend was one she had been told by her Grandfather Macneill, who "liked a dramatic story, had a good memory for its fine points, and could tell it well" (*Alpine Path* 40). She then turned his tale into her rhyme, but that is not all. Individual journal entries tell us what the retrospectives do not, that she herself retold the tale more than once. She had written a prose version of it for the *Montreal Witness* school essay competition during the winter of 1888-89, "and got honorable mention," nearly two years before she turned it into rhyme (Feb. 19, 1890; *SJI*: 17).

Unlike the Cape Leforce one, the *Marcopolo* story was not first shaped by more than one generation of story-tellers; it had its origin in an event she witnessed herself, when the Norwegian ship was run on shore during a storm in

1883. She chose the wreck as the subject for her second attempt at the essay contest in February 1890; in May the *Witness* report for the Island ranked her essay third in the county. Whether or not she revised it for its eventual publication in 1891, I cannot tell, but we do know that she also turned it into rhyme for publication in 1892.

These tellings and re-tellings illustrate the old-fashioned version of our contemporary Three R's (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle).

"Waste not, want not" is the good old principle, and Montgomery was not wasteful. She recycled not only her experience for her books and stories, using everything from a geranium named Bonny to her literary autobiography, but also her reading and writing of all kinds.

We know that she jotted down in a notebook ideas that might be useful for stories or poems (Eggleston 35). She mined her journals for material for letters to her correspondents, and for *The Alpine Path*. At least once (in 1925)—and this is rather like saving "pieces of string too short to be useful"—she took the trouble to write down the stories she had never written, and one she had written "whereof no record remaineth." It was a Sunday School Library book which she had not managed to sell, even after she tried to recycle it as a cut-down serial (July 16, 1925; *SJIII*: 240). Sometimes she expanded serials, as she did when she "padded" *Una of the Garden* to produce *Kilmenny of the Orchard* ("against her better judgment," she told MacMillan). The plot, she acknowledged, "grew out of [a] motif suggested by an old tale I had read somewhere" (*My Dear* 49). "Curiously enough," she reported, in one of the many ways that stories both reflect and shape lives, "after the publication of the serial I had a letter from a woman who told me that her little girl was just like 'Una' ... She wrote very appealingly to know if my story had any foundation in fact, as if it had, she would have some hope that her daughter might speak some day" (*My Dear* 49). One incident in *The Blue Castle* she took from a newspaper account, and when the same incident appeared in someone else's book, she suspected neither co-incidence, nor plagiarism, but only similar working methods. "Likely Mr. Sherman read of this, as I did, and worked it into his novel" (*My Dear* 154). Some of the stories in *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road* were drawn from newspaper and magazine clippings, which Montgomery preserved in her scrapbooks (Epperly 232n).

She made the most of her own publications, as she had from the earliest successes, such as the Marcopolo story which appeared in prose in both a Montreal and a Charlottetown paper, as well as in verse. Rea Wilmshurst has documented how the same story might appear twice in the same year, in an American and a Canadian magazine, or after five, ten, or fifteen years. "How we went to the wedding," one of the few western stories, turned up in the *Housewife* in 1913 and in the *Family Herald* in 1935, as well as being worked into *Rilla of Ingleside* (1920) in the interim. It was by no means the only short story which found its way into a novel: a more awkward example is "A House Divided Against Itself"

woven into *A Tangled Web*, as the story of Big Sam and Little Sam.

Another tangled web of telling and retelling is the history of the *Chronicles of Avonlea*:

In 1912 I had no new book ready so the Pages [her publisher] asked me to send them all my short stories for a volume to fill in. I sent them all I had of any value at all.... I must say that I had rewritten all the stories largely and added a good deal of new material mostly descriptive ... [as well as] several appearances of Anne in them — inserted for ... inclusion in the ‘Chronicles’.... They selected the best and ... sent back the rest but *unknown to me kept copies of them*. ... I destroyed the MSS they returned as I did not think they would ever be needed again.... [The] new descriptive bits I kept and used them from time to time in the various books that followed — *The Golden Road*, *Anne of the Island*, etc etc. (*My Dear* 141, 143)

An already complicated web became far worse when Page published the purloined stories in 1920 as *Further Chronicles of Avonlea*; the courts took nine years to sort out the mess.

The quintessence of “waste not, want not” appears in a letter to MacMillan:

I find in my journal a delightful story my friend told me. It’s too good to be wasted so here’s to pass it on. (*My Dear* 149-50)

It is a story about a rejected suitor who tears up handfuls of newly planted hedge in his disappointment; forty years later, the trees have not been replaced. Even this little story has been told and retold: Montgomery’s letter draws upon her journal, which draws upon her friend’s narrative, right back to the “tell-tale” gaps in the hedge themselves.

I said early on that reading Montgomery is strangely familiar, and I haven’t even given myself a chance to explore the familiarities less overt than these borrowings. Like Montgomery, we grow up and live with and by the familiarity of the fairy-tale and the romance. We read out of the books and back into them the hues of our own lives. No wonder *The Blue Castle* reappeared in Colleen McCullough’s book, years after she read it. Alice Munro spoke of wanting to possess a beloved story; they sometimes possess us.

Two stories of possession, one mine, and one Montgomery’s, conclude this exploration. Mine first: it happened that the most dramatic progress I made in learning to write took place during the year I read all the Anne books. I was particularly taken with the story “Each in His Own Tongue” in the *Chronicles of Avonlea*, and, imitation being the sincerest form of flattery, I retold that story as one of my weekly compositions. Not unlike that of Kilmeny, I suppose, the story is about finding or claiming a voice, and though I had no desire to be a musician like Felix Moore, I knew somehow that in rewriting the story I was carrying out the charge Felix’s grandfather gave him in the last paragraph: “Speak to the world in your own tongue” (*Chronicles* 69). In playing his violin, Felix was telling “the old, old story” in his own tongue, as his grandfather told it — the “old, old story of Jesus and his love” — from the pulpit. This is the irony I am struggling with, that finding one’s own tongue does not mean repudiating the old, old stories: it means retelling them, as Felix did, as I did, as Montgomery did.

I think I am still retelling that story — in almost as many tellings as Montgomery's "The Life-book of Uncle Jesse," a story published in 1909, and woven into *Anne's House of Dreams* in 1917. Uncle Jesse's Life Book "was an old leather-bound book filled with the record of his voyages and adventures" (*Along* 43). The words are identical to the description in *Anne's House of Dreams* (132). The stories are *lived* first, then, under the charm of story-telling, "brought vividly before the hearer and made to live again" (*Along* 39). The life-book, however, contains only "the [rough] outlines of his famous tales" (39) and to reach more than an immediate listener, they need to be retold by someone else. Uncle Jesse's book is undertaken by Robert Kennedy, "who juggled with words in a masterly fashion, but complained that he found it hard to create incidents or characters" (43). Anne has even higher demands for the person who will work on Captain Jim's book; her own gift for "the fanciful, the fairylike, the pretty" will not serve (*AHD* 132). "To write Captain Jim's life-book as it should be written" she tells Gilbert, "one should be a master of vigorous yet subtle style, a keen psychologist, a born humourist and a born tragedian. A rare combination of gifts is needed" (132-133). In working on the life-book, the writer makes it his own: "He dreamed and brooded over lost Margaret until she became a vivid reality to him and lived in his pages"; conversely, the book makes him its own: "As the book progressed it took possession of him" (*Along* 45; *AHD* 181). The earlier story is even more complicated than the *House of Dreams* version, for originally, the life-book of Uncle Jesse is retold by Kennedy, and the retelling ("The Life-Book of Uncle Jesse") is told by the first-person narrator Mary. Her narrative ends in a Montgomery sunrise, but not even its "shining, wonderful" details (*Along* 47) can quite exorcise the impression that in revivifying the life-book, the writers have exhausted Uncle Jesse's life. I am reminded of Montgomery's comments on the effects of reading Kipling's "Ballads":

They are capital — full of virile strength and life. They thrill and pulsate and burn, they carry you along in their rush and swing till you forget your own petty interests and cares and burst out into a broader soul-world and gain a much clearer realization of all the myriad forms of life that are beating around your own little one. (Dec. 31, 1898; *SJ I*: 230)

The imagery is a robust version of the effects on Uncle Jesse of reading his own life: he does not "forget" himself, he *loses* himself, he *dies*: "Out on that shining tide his spirit drifted, over the sunrise sea of pearl and silver, to the haven where lost Margaret waited beyond the storms and calms" (47).

Ten years later, her correspondent Weber suggested that Kipling was "written out" (Eggleston 65), a suggestion she repudiated, though with not much confidence. Here is the dark side of "waste not, want not" — the fear that literary invention is not a renewable resource.

Even more interesting, however, is the curious fact that Mary, who narrates

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the story of "The Life Book of Uncle Jesse," has had a hand in Kennedy's narrative of the book. It was she who suggested the ending, which she never reveals. Like my borrowed copy of *Anne of Green Gables*, the copy that lacked its last pages, "The Life Book of Uncle Jesse" begs us to supply the missing ending, and thus draws all its readers into this many-levelled collaboration of telling and retelling.

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