

The selected journals of L.M. Montgomery Volume I: 1889-1910, Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston. Oxford University Press, 1985. 424 pp. \$24.95 cloth. ISBN 0-19-540503-X.

L.M. Montgomery's name is so widely known as the author of *Anne of Green Gables* that her *Selected journals* would be assured of an already interested readership because of her acknowledged literary reputation. How much do her journals tell us about the thoughts and feelings of a famous woman and about the circumstances of her life? Autobiographical accounts always promise fascinating personal anecdotes and these journals keep that promise. Yet there is much more than gossip here, for Montgomery was a woman with literary ambitions and her account of her struggles to achieve success through writing is a valuable contribution to the "Woman question" at the turn of the century.

This selection has been made from the first two of the ten handwritten volumes of Montgomery's journals which she kept from 1889 to 1942. It presents the young unmarried Maud Montgomery from the age of fourteen up to early 1910. By the time she was thirty-five, and the author of a bestseller *Anne of Green Gables*, she was engaged to be married to Rev. Ewan Macdonald, and she had just survived a nervous breakdown. Readers owe a debt of gratitude to Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston for their scrupulously sensitive editing. They have not tried to impose a pattern upon her miscellany of recorded events but have adopted a principle of merely omitting entries which are repetitive or non-essential. The dates of all omissions are listed at the back and there are few abridgements. They have also included 104 of the photographs which Montgomery inserted in her first two volumes, very informative notes and an excellent introduction. This is surely the definitive edition of Montgomery's journals, now in the possession of the University of Guelph.

Journals are an open form of writing, recording the writer's multiple changing selves. Just as this is one of their charms for the reader so it was surely one for Montgomery, first as a girl aware of feeling "forty different ways at once" and then as a young woman conscious of the disparities between her smilingly social self and her turbulent inner life of feeling and ambition. Yet her journals are not diaries; they lack that provisional quality because Montgomery kept her journals irregularly, seldom writing "to the moment" but preferring to wait till she had lived through a crisis before recording it. Certainly the kind of autobiographical record changes as her talent for writing and self analysis develops, and the journals provide continuous writing practice for the young Maud just as she increasingly uses them as confidant and memorybank. One of the reader's keenest

pleasures is to watch Montgomery finding a voice of her own, working through various stylistic mannerisms to find a more direct language to record her private life, so that the journals also become the place of creative ordering and self-discovery.

They provide an entertaining circumstantial account of Canadian provincial life as Montgomery records her childhood in Prince Edward Island, her visit to her father in Saskatchewan, her student days in Charlottetown and Halifax, and her three years as a teacher. It is always to "green old Cavendish" that she returns, and she spent many of the years between 1889 and 1910 (where this volume ends) confined there to housekeeping for her grandmother. Through the changing ranges of her voice, the context of decent ordinariness is transformed. Like Anne Shirley, the young Maud always finds scope for imagination in nature and in the "electrical human interest" of school concerts and summer picnics. These are the "exciting times" of her youth, in marked contrast to her satiric comments on similar activities three years later: "Preserve me from pie socials. They are the abomination of desolation" (p. 236).

While there is something of the Jane Austen heroine about the twenty-year-old Maud with her determination to be light, bright and sparkling, her manner of recording changes decisively in 1897 with her accounts of two traumatic love affairs, the first with Edward Simpson to whom she became secretly engaged and then suffered agonies of physical revulsion, and her passionate love for Herman Leard. That account bears a striking resemblance to Alice Munro's story of Del Jordan and Garnet French, even to her necessary rejection of Leard: "I am very ambitious — perhaps too ambitious. Herman told me that once — he seemed to hate my ambition — perhaps he felt the truth that it was the real barrier between us" (p. 220).

Indeed the central force in her life was her creative ambition, and after 1898 her growing self-confidence becomes apparent in the frankness with which she describes her writing: "Nearly everything I think or do or say is subordinated to a desire to improve my work" (p. 228). In the miserably isolated years up to 1910 all her zest for living goes into her writing and *Anne of Green Gables*, her great "labor of love" is plainly her "recherche du temps perdu." Though she became engaged to the Rev. Ewan Macdonald in 1906, the "one really important thing" of 1907 was the acceptance of *Anne* by the Boston publisher L.C. Page, and Macdonald's return from Glasgow is merely mentioned as an aside. Her literary triumph with *Anne* and its sequel is balanced in agonized counterpoint with her growing nervous malaise which culminates in the nervous breakdown of 1910.

What emerges from these journals is Montgomery's sturdy independence, her isolation and ambition. The central interest is not in gossip or even social history (though there is plenty of both), but in what they tell about the nature and education of one woman with literary ambitions, how she

achieves fame and economic independence and at what personal cost. Though having no part in any women's movement, Montgomery unself-consciously engages with the central issues of feminism through her sense of her own potential and her struggles to fulfil her creative ambition. Montgomery always complied with social convention, though her private urges set her profoundly at odds with society's expectation of what a woman should be. Her journals provide a moving personal account of the triumphs and costs of such resistance, dramatising that doubleness of which she was so conscious in her 1910 entry: "Yet I have won literary success and fame...but I *would* like a little happiness, just for a change" (p. 393).

Was it the editors' inspiration, or was it Montgomery's, to place the wistful portrait of "a pensive Sunday School scholar [LMM c. 1884]" at the end of this volume?

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UN CONTE PHILOSOPHIQUE

Non, je ne suis pas né, Rita Scalabrini. Montréal, Leméac, 1985. 48 pp., 9,95\$ broché. ISBN 2-7609-9855-X.

Déjà connue pour ses deux ouvrages précédents, *L'Acadie et la mer* et *La Famille Citrouillard*, Rita Scalabrini nous présente dans son troisième livre, *Non, je ne suis pas né*, un autre conte plein de fantaisie et de sagesse philosophique.

Le personnage principal du livre (qui raconte son histoire à la première personne) est un épouvantail qui est à la recherche d'une identité (comme il nous le dit, "Il s'agit de se comprendre soi-même.") L'épouvantail, pour trouver une réponse à la question toujours très difficile, à savoir le sens et l'utilité de son existence quotidienne, observe la nature qui l'entoure (un ruisseau, les prés, la vie dans le jardin et les champs) et s'engage en même temps dans des dialogues philosophiques (et poétiques) avec ses amis — les oiseaux qu'il abrite sous ses bras de paille, un vieux Chinois, une libellule et un petit garçon. Les conversations et les aventures racontées par les amis de l'épouvantail sont souvent très intéressantes, mais l'intrigue et le développement des personnages secondaires restent toujours subordonnés