

# The Canadian *Künstlerroman*: The Creative Protagonist in L.M. Montgomery, Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence

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## *Abstract*

My thesis is engaged in conceptualising the genre of the Canadian female *Künstlerroman*, and in charting how this genre has been deployed by L.M. Montgomery, Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence. This project addresses the implications of Canada's literary identity, as constructed by female authors, and offers a unique perspective on their feminising of the *Künstlerroman*, and the degrees of meta-narrative and autobiography which the use of creative female protagonists entails. This thesis identifies the genre of Canadian female *Künstlerroman*, and explores both its significance in sustaining existing readings, and its potential for generating new interpretations. It is structured into four chapters, as well as a detailed critical introduction. The introduction outlines my understanding of the *Künstlerroman* narrative in conjuncture with Canadian literary identity, as well as offering a brief overview of the three writers considered in this study. Chapter One focuses on the treatment of Canadian landscapes and locations within the texts, considering how the space is gendered, and reinforcing the significance of the texts as explicitly Canadian. Chapter Two examines the presentation of the protagonists' childhoods, and negotiates the nature/nurture debate whilst also identifying the importance of mentor figures in the *Künstlerroman*. Chapter Three charts the protagonists' progression into adult life, and acknowledges the increasingly complex demands made upon them as they attempt to reconcile personal and professional commitments. Chapter Four explores the strong Gothic element that is present in all the texts, and considers how gender and genre combine to destabilise the narrative and regenerate the latent menace of Gothic tropes and traditions. Finally, a brief conclusion evaluates my reading of these texts as *Künstlerroman* narratives and identifies their defining characteristics. Throughout, my thesis maps both the dual construction of the writers' fictional characters and literary careers - driven by both the desire for self-expression and artistic subjectivity - and the meta-fictive and self-referential writing into existence of three national writers. This process is constantly driven by questions of Canadian literary identity and female creativity, and how they combine to produce the persistent and intriguing genre of the Canadian female *Künstlerroman*.

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# *Introduction*

*A great deal has been made, from time to time, of the search for 'the Canadian identity'; sometimes we are told that this item is simply something we have mislaid, like the car keys, and might find down behind the sofa if we are only diligent enough, whereas at other times we have been told that the object in question doesn't really exist and we are pursuing a phantom. Sometimes we are told that although we don't have of these 'identities', we ought to, because other countries do.*

*~ Margaret Atwood*

Like many doctoral studies, this project has altered beyond recognition from its original conception four years ago. I was initially intrigued by questions about creativity, identity and women's writing, but found myself searching for a suitable framework in which to ask them (and latching onto several unsuitable frameworks along the way). A suggestion to focus on Canadian literature proved to be a revelation. I must confess that prior to this, I had never thought explicitly about Canadian writing, or even recognised that it existed in the same way that I recognised English or American or Russian literatures: it quickly became apparent that I was far from alone in this position, and indeed that one of the defining features of Canadian literature is a deeply-rooted ambivalence towards its own cultural identity. Still, I approached the field as an 'outsider', and was amazed by what I found. I was struck by the unusual ascendancy of Canadian women writers; the first novel to be written and set in Canada was Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1716), making it a culturally seminal text that is both *by* and *about* a woman; meanwhile in a more contemporary context, even readers who have never considered Canada as possessing a literary identity are familiar with the work of Margaret Atwood, or Carol Shields, and while not every reader could identify L.M. Montgomery, they are almost certain to have come across her most famous creation in *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) . In seeking to understand why this should be so, I was drawn to a narrative pattern that repeatedly emerges in twentieth-century Canadian women's writing, and permits a unique degree of insight into what it means to become a writer in a Canadian cultural context, as well as offering a detailed and multifaceted exploration of how women writers identify themselves in terms of literary traditions, and reconcile the demands of their personal and professional lives. That narrative pattern is the Canadian female *Künstlerroman*.

This is, therefore, a study of how three Canadian women writers have chosen to explore the *Künstlerroman* in their fiction, and how they have deployed their creative

protagonists to investigate the issues of personal, national and literary identity that are fundamental to appreciating the female dominance of Canadian literature. Through my reading of L.M. Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon* (1923), *Emily Climbs* (1925) and *Emily's Quest* (1927), Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) and *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978) and Margaret Laurence's *A Bird in the House* (1970) and *The Diviners* (1974), I will outline the myriad ways in which they rework the *Künstlerroman*, and the ways in which their creative female protagonists – Emily, Del, Rose, Vanessa and Morag – act as both ciphers and catalysts for ideas about culture, gender and creativity. This investigation begins here, with a detailed introduction to the key terms of the debate, which locates my work in relation to existing bodies of criticism and areas of interest. The first section compiles a working definition of what is potentially the most unfamiliar term in my investigation, and offers a brief guide to the *Künstlerroman*. This is followed by an exploration of Canadian literary identity, providing a wider framework to this particular study and addressing some foundational issues of national and gendered identities in Canadian culture. The next section introduces the writers and their work and explains the rationale behind their inclusion, as well as that behind the exclusion of one of Canada's best known and most successful women writers: Margaret Atwood. Finally, there is a brief outline of how the argument will progress over the following four chapters, and a summary of my intentions in focusing on what I believe to be one of the most persistently adaptable, intriguing and provocative narratives at work in Canadian literature.

### **The *Künstlerroman*: A Working Definition**

One of the most striking aspects of the German language has to be its faculty for allocating just one word to a concept that would require at least twenty in English, as with *Schadenfreude* and *Zeitgeist*. The general meaning of the word can be grasped, but it

can be difficult to explain its essence, and precisely define its borders. And so when it comes to the term *Künstlerroman*, which is so central to understanding this project, it is necessary to discuss in detail the possibilities of the term, its literary manifestations, and a brief history of its criticism – especially in relation to women’s writing. The word itself best translates as ‘artist’s novel’, and is linguistically and thematically rooted in the *Bildungsroman*, the novel that deals with a person’s formative years of personal and psychological development and charts their progress into adult life.<sup>1</sup> This term arose from the German Enlightenment, and was coined by the philologist Johann Morgenstern. As an offshoot of the *Bildungsroman*, the *Künstlerroman* shares many of its defining characteristics: the development of the protagonist from childhood to adulthood is portrayed in sympathetic detail; this process of maturation is frequently complicated and arduous due to family circumstances or personal dissatisfaction; the protagonist finds herself in conflict with the social order; and the narrative tends to conclude with the protagonist’s growing acceptance of their nature and their place in the world, and with a sense of reflection on the journey that has led them there.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the difference between the *Bildungsroman* and the *Künstlerroman* lies in the nature of the protagonist, for while the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* is frequently sensitive and intelligent, with artistic sympathies, the *Künstlerroman* is specifically about the development of an actual creative artist. They can operate in any medium, including dance, theatre, sculpture, painting, music and opera, but the metafictional potential of the narrative is at its most intriguing when the protagonist is a writer. As Evy Varsamopoulou observes: ‘the *Künstlerroman* with a writer or a poet protagonist discloses a critical awareness of the *métier* of literary art, blurring the boundaries between fiction and criticism, as the novelist

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<sup>1</sup> There are prominent examples of this narrative in literatures of all nations and periods, but some particularly striking illustrations include Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (1795), Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1857), Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1860), Gustave Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education* (1869), Herman Hesse’s *Demian* (1919) and J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951).

<sup>2</sup> Further variants upon this theme of character formation are the *Erziehungsromane* (a novel about education) and the *Entwicklungsromane* (a novel about a more explicitly philosophical development).

becomes critic of his/her own creative process or product'.<sup>3</sup> This interest in the critically self-conscious dynamic of the *Künstlerroman* is reflected by the narratives that are considered within this study: four out of five protagonists are writers, while the fifth is an actress.

While there is no set blueprint for the *Künstlerroman*, there are certain characteristics and areas of commonality that can be identified. Firstly, there is the narrative method. The genre is by no means synonymous with fictionalised autobiography, but there is an obvious degree of overlap, and this can become somewhat complicated. There is the ever-present temptation to read the author's life into their plotlines, and to seek definitive 'solutions' to the enigma of the authorial presence. Varsamopoulou has noted how this approach can underestimate the narrative and reduce it to 'a kind of 'spot the author' game'.<sup>4</sup> She warns that this determined hunt for biographical detail also 'detracts attention from the intricacies of the text'.<sup>5</sup> But what Varsamopoulou overlooks is that the writers of *Künstlerromans* are also aware of the genre's tendency to be read as autobiography, and this is something every author embarking upon the writing of a *Künstlerroman* can exploit as much or as little as they should wish. This issue is signposted by the type of narrative deployed. *Künstlerroman* are frequently written in the first person, a mode of narration that invites an immediate identification with the author. Adelaide Morris explores the significance of this in women's writing, using the phrase "room of one's own' narratives' to describe first person narratives of female development, including the creative development of the *Künstlerroman* genre: '[these] narratives tend to be told in the autobiographical or pseudo-autobiographical first-person singular, an intimate, urgent voice that imparts information

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<sup>3</sup> Evy Varsamopoulou, *The Poetics of the Künstlerinroman and the Aesthetics of the Sublime* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pxii-xiii. Varsamopoulou uses the term *Künstlerinroman* as a specifically feminised version of the *Künstlerroman*, but this is not widely used in other criticism, and so for the sake of simplicity I have not felt it necessary to follow her example.

<sup>4</sup> Varsamopoulou, *The Poetics of the Künstlerinroman*, pxviii.

<sup>5</sup> Varsamopoulou, *The Poetics of the Künstlerinroman*, pxxv.

about life, demonstrates how the personal can become political, and supports an implied or overt claim to inner-directedness'.<sup>6</sup> These issues of autobiography and authorial presence manifest themselves in the texts considered here in many different forms, with varying degrees of literary self-consciousness that contribute towards an understanding of the *Künstlerroman* as an extended exercise in metafiction, whereby the text is constantly informed by a deliberately literary sensibility, rather than mere personal confession. This tension between personal and fictional modes of narration frequently revolves around the protagonist of the *Künstlerroman*, who can be read as the author's representative as well as their construct.

The characterisation of the *Künstlerroman* protagonist is crucial to the genre, and frequently embodies a dichotomous understanding of what makes an artist. On the one hand, the narrative of development allows for the influence of nurture: family circumstances, early education and social background are all explored in detail, and taken into the account of the protagonist's journey. And yet on the other hand, there is almost invariably a suggestion that the artist is, by their innate nature, marked out for a creative career. Carl D. Malmgren identifies three distinctive features of the *Künstlerroman* protagonist that all call attention to this aspect of their position within the text: 'the artist is a marked man[sic]':<sup>7</sup>

- 1) the artist's name – the name itself or the act of naming sets the artist apart from the ordinary, everyday world [...]
- 2) his appearance, demeanour, carriage – certain physiological oddities serve as signs of the artist's difference, queerness, uniqueness [...]

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<sup>6</sup> Adelaide Morris, 'First Persons Plural in Contemporary Feminist Fiction', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol.11 No.1 (Spring, 1992), p13 (pp11-29).

<sup>7</sup> Carl D. Malmgren, 'From Work to Text: The Modernist and Postmodernist *Künstlerroman*', *A Forum on Fiction* Vol.21, No.1 (Autumn, 1987) p6 (pp5-28).

3) his parentage – the artist's parents inevitably reflect his contradictory traits, his divided self, his dubious heritage<sup>8</sup>

This formula will be considered in detail in Chapter Two, where it can be applied specifically to the protagonists within this study.<sup>9</sup> For now, it calls attention to the strategies deployed by writers in creating their texts, and reminds us we are dealing with a fictional genre that has its own traditions, conventions and codes to consider. One of the most revealing of these 'codes' is the way in which the *Künstlerroman* text positions itself in relation to other texts, and how the author makes use of intertextual dynamics in developing her character and crafting the text.

Because *Künstlerroman* novels are narratives of creative development, they are also narratives of creative interest and acquisition. The story of a writer is inextricably also the story of a reader, and the texts are therefore documents of literary development, and forums in which the author can express their own ideas and establish their literary priorities and preferences. Janet Carey and Peter Mortensen therefore include the *Künstlerroman* in their article on 'literacy narratives', highlighting the intertextual significance of the texts: 'Literacy narratives also play a part in how we view our artists and how they construct and tell their stories as artists'.<sup>10</sup> This 'literacy narrative' functions on two levels within the *Künstlerroman*. Most obviously, there are direct references to other works of literature, as the protagonist develops their craft through extensive reading. On this level, the 'literacy narrative' supports Carey and Mortensen's view of it as a device that establishes creative authority: 'writers often take pains to locate their artistic beginnings in the acquisition of written literacy, detailing authors and books that first piqued their imagination'.<sup>11</sup> But there is another level of meaning at work in the

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<sup>8</sup> Malmgren, 'From Work to Text', p6.

<sup>9</sup> For more on this, see p109-112.

<sup>10</sup> Janet Carey & Peter Mortensen, 'Reading Literacy Narratives', *College English*, Vol. 54, No. 5, (Sep, 1992) p530 (pp512-539).

<sup>11</sup> Carey & Mortensen, 'Reading Literacy Narratives', p531.

intertextuality of the *Künstlerroman*. As well as referencing texts directly within the narrative, through the character's reading, the narrative itself can echo and reinterpret texts, offering a new treatment or understanding of the original source, and establishing a complex dialogue between the textual materials. This device enables the author to open up a discursive comparison between texts, and this sense of communication and textual resonance can be especially significant in a consideration of women's writing. Coral Ann Howells observes that: 'These strategies are not peculiar to women's writing [but] the difference here is that these stories are all told from the woman's angle, registering a feminised awareness of dislocation within the very literary traditions in which they are writing'<sup>12</sup> But rather than simply being a means for women writers to 'answer back', textual reinterpretation also establishes links between women's writing itself, creating a sense of communication within a female literary tradition. This dialogue crosses borders and time frames, emphasising the sense that this can be read as a rhizomatic rather than a linear relationship. This relationship between texts can emphasise the different options available to women in different time periods or locations. It can also serve as a means by which to connect women writers, and support the female literary tradition that it explores. And, by extending this sense of tradition and community through the text, the writer of the intertextual *Künstlerroman* is able to negotiate for her own place within the network, and establish her legitimate inclusion within a discussion of female creativity.

Despite these factors that contribute towards the characterisation of the *Künstlerroman* – the interplay between fiction and autobiography, the portrayal of the protagonist, and the intertextual dynamics of the narrative – it remains a highly flexible and adaptable genre, to the point where it is often difficult to clarify exactly what sort of text constitutes a *Künstlerroman*. This is related to the equally flexible and adaptable nature of its central concern, for while certain tropes (such as that of the innately talented artist)

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<sup>12</sup> Coral Ann Howells, *Private and Fictional Words: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s* (London: Methuen, 1987), p6.



have tended to retain their appeal, notions about what constitutes art and what constitutes an artist mutate and develop depending on the dominant cultural notions of the time. Therefore, there are infinite manifestations of the *Künstlerroman*, from the German Romantic of Ludwig Tieck's *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* (1798) to the British Modernist of James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Varsamopoulou observes that the *Künstlerroman*:

[I]s best described as inclusive rather than exclusive. In effect, *Künstlerinromane* invariably rely on other popular and dominant genres of their time in order to take shape; there is always one dominant genre by which the *Künstlerin* narrative is shaped; however, this co-existence is subject to interactive transformations.<sup>13</sup>

This inclusive and resilient mutability is, to my mind, a definite strength of the genre, contributing significantly to the *Künstlerroman*'s potential to offer revealing insight into both culturally specific circumstances and universal commonalities that shape the creative process. But it is also a factor that has contributed to the tendency for the genre to be overlooked, or subsumed into studies of metafiction and/or autobiography rather than of the actual *Künstlerroman* narrative itself.

If specific academic criticism of the *Künstlerroman* is a rarity, criticism of the female *Künstlerroman* is even harder to come by. Roberta Serat concludes her study of the *Künstlerroman* with the casual observation that '[i]t is interesting to note that all the authors of this study are males and that their artist-protagonists are also males'.<sup>14</sup> Serat's study focuses upon the work of Herman Hesse, D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce, and so her emphasis on male artists would be understandable enough, if it were only contextualised by some comment that recognised this emphasis does not have to be the 'default setting' for a study of the *Künstlerroman*. This sense of exclusion-by-omission can also be found in

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<sup>13</sup> Varsamopoulou, *The Poetics of the Künstlerinroman*, pxxv.

<sup>14</sup> Roberta Serat, *Voyage into Creativity: The Modern Künstlerroman* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992) p151.

Maurice Beebe's *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts* (1964), in which female characters are considered only as mothers or muses to male artists, and the novelist's ultimate role is as 'a valid spokesman for all creative men'.<sup>15</sup> The wealth of *Künstlerroman* narratives by and about male writers naturally necessitates their study, but the failure to acknowledge that there is an equally rich tradition of female *Künstlerroman* narratives is somewhat galling.

In *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman* (1985), Linda Huf attempts to redress this exclusion with a study of the female *Künstlerroman* as it appears in nineteenth- and twentieth-century North American literature. Huf's analysis is constructed upon a set of guiding principles that, she believes, characterise and define the female *Künstlerroman*. Initially, one might assume these principles would translate easily into a study of Canadian rather than American texts, but this is not necessarily the case. Huf's reading relies on the female artist protagonist as possessing traditionally 'masculine' attributes, so that she is 'athletic in build, skilled in sports, unshrinking in fights, able in mathematics, plucky in love, and daring in [her] sexual adventures'.<sup>16</sup> Huf's identification of these qualities as 'masculine' is problematic, and negates the female protagonist's capacity to be fearless, logical and athletic whilst also being exhibiting tendencies Huf identifies as 'feminine', such as empathy, shyness or sensitivity. This binary partition does not fit readily into my analysis of the Canadian *Künstlerroman*, where the protagonists are characterised by their complexity and cohesion as individuals rather than falling neatly into generically oppositional divides.<sup>17</sup> Huf acknowledges the difficulties faced by the female protagonist who is 'torn not only between life and art but, more specifically, between her role as a woman, demanding selfless devotion to others, and her aspirations as an artist, requiring exclusive commitment to work'.<sup>18</sup> While this dilemma certainly

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<sup>15</sup> Maurice Beebe, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts* (New York: New York University Press, 1964) pvi. My italics.

<sup>16</sup> Linda Huf, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman* (New York: Frederick Unger, 1985), p4.

<sup>17</sup> For more on this, see p137.

<sup>18</sup> Huf, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman*, p5.

comes into play, especially as the protagonists attempt to find both personal and professional fulfilment in their adult lives, I feel that once more, the inflexibility of Huf's definitions – a woman is selfless, an artist is selfish – overlooks the myriad ways in which the protagonists in this study strive and struggle, with admittedly varying degrees of success, to reconcile these aspects of their lives. Huf's reading also maintains that the narrative of the female *Künstlerroman* 'pits its protagonist against a sexually conventional foil',<sup>19</sup> and that the primary dynamic to female interaction is competitive and undermining. Yet in the *Künstlerromans* that comprise this study, this is counteracted by a succession of strong and supportive female friendships that provide the artist with genuine support.<sup>20</sup> It is quickly apparent that Huf's model of the nineteenth and twentieth-century American female *Künstlerroman*, however intriguing, will not serve as a constructive framework for my reading of the Canadian female *Künstlerroman* in the twentieth-century.

With this gap between an American critical framework and the Canadian focus of this study in mind, it is therefore worth considering the existing critical status of the Canadian female *Künstlerroman*. The potential to read the texts in this study as narratives of artistic development has been frequently acknowledged in critical work on the individual writers,<sup>21</sup> but comparative treatments that specifically invoke the *Künstlerroman* are altogether rarer. Reingard M. Nischik's article on the short stories of Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro is an intriguing exception to this rule, but is a precise investigation of Canadian short fiction as an 'emergent literary market'<sup>22</sup> rather than a

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<sup>19</sup> Huf, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman*, p7.

<sup>20</sup> For more on this, see p139-140 and p187-188.

<sup>21</sup> For more on this, see Elizabeth Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass: L.M. Montgomery's Heroines and the Pursuit of Romance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), Coral Ann Howells, *Alice Munro: Contemporary World Writers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) and Nora Foster Stovel, '(W)rites of Passage: The Typescript of *The Diviners* as Shadowtext', David Staines (Ed.) *Margaret Laurence: Critical Reflections* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2001) pp101-121.

<sup>22</sup> Reingard M. Nischik, 'Multiple Challenges: The Canadian Artist Story and Gender', Charlotte Sturges & Martin Kuester (Eds.) *Reading(s) from a Distance: European Perspectives of Canadian Women's Writing* (Augsburg: Wißner-Verlag, 2008) p42 (pp41-53).

treatment of the *Künstlerroman* narrative. At the other end of this scale Faye Hammill's *Literary Culture and Female Authorship in Canada* is a complex overview of women writers in Canadian culture, which explicitly engages with the use of the creative protagonist and charts the intertextuality of Canadian women's writing from Frances Brooke to Margaret Atwood. Hammill's reading 'turns on the ways in which these aspects of literary culture and authorship in Canada have been inscribed in imaginative, autobiographical and critical texts'<sup>23</sup>. In this comprehensive reading of female authorship, the *Künstlerroman* is a minor component rather than a major theme. This study therefore moves on to a more detailed consideration of Canadian literary culture and identity, in the knowledge that this specific close focus on the Canadian *Künstlerroman* could prove a worthwhile and original contribution to the critical dialogue.

### **Canadian Literary Identity: Gender and Nation**

It is never an easy assignment to characterise or define a national literature, whether or not the nation in question is one's own. It is further complicated when the process is, at one level, incidental rather than intrinsic to the task in hand – my project is primarily engaged with conceptualising the Canadian female *Künstlerroman* in the twentieth century, and as such the existence of a Canadian literary identity has to be taken as a pre-requisite rather than as something to be debated at length. And yet while this project has to work on the assumption that a Canadian literary identity does exist, it cannot work on the assumption that this is a simple or a stable foundation upon which to construct the conceptualisation of the *Künstlerroman*. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge the problems inherent in defining a national literature, and to consider their dynamic in the context of Canadian culture and identity.

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<sup>23</sup> Faye Hammill, *Literary Culture and Female Authorship in Canada* (New York: Rodopi, 2003), pxi-xii.

The first issue to be addressed is the traditionally dominant trend to dismiss and belittle the idea of Canada actually having any culture worth speaking of. As one might expect, much of this derision comes from outside the nation. Rupert Brooke castigated Canada as ‘a country without a soul’<sup>24</sup> and recorded that ‘the only poet in Canada was very nice to me in Ottawa. Canada’s a bloody place for a sensitive real poet like this to live all his life in’.<sup>25</sup> A French artist on a lecture tour in 1931 was frustrated by the Canadians’ dour provinciality: ‘Tonight I give lecture to the Art Students’ League. I want a picture of a horse to show that animal is beautiful because every part is made for function, without ornament. In Paris I would show a woman, but in Toronto I show a horse’.<sup>26</sup> And Henry David Thoreau damned with faint praise; ‘I fear I have not got much to say about Canada, not having seen much’<sup>27</sup> before going on to characterise the inhabitants as ‘placid, jolly, woodcutting and woodchuck-eating’<sup>28</sup> in *Walden* (1854). Yet, rather than being simply the prerogative of the supercilious spectator, it is quickly evident that slating Canadian culture is also a national pastime. In Margaret Atwood’s *Cat’s Eye* (1988) the protagonist wryly explores the politics at work behind Canadians’ criticisms of Canada, ‘[e]veryone who lived here said those things: provincial, self-satisfied, boring. If you said that, it showed you recognised these qualities but did not partake of them yourself’<sup>29</sup> and there has never been a shortage of fellow Canadian contributors who are in accord with this deliberately self-deprecating attitude. Frances Brooke despaired that ‘elegant arts are unknown here; the rigour of the climate suspends the very powers of the

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<sup>24</sup> Rupert Brooke, ‘Letter’, Sandra Martin & Roger Hall, *Rupert Brooke in Canada* (Toronto: PMLA Books, 1978) p24.

<sup>25</sup> Brooke, ‘Letter’, p24.

<sup>26</sup> Anonymous, Nancy McPhee (Ed.), *The Complete Book of Insults* (London: Guild Publishing, 1982), p103.

<sup>27</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *A Yankee in Canada with Anti Slavery and Reform Papers* (Montana: Kessinger Publishing Co, 2004) p1.

<sup>28</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972) p16.

<sup>29</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Cat’s Eye* (London: Bloomsbury, 1989) p14.

understanding'<sup>30</sup> and Anna Jameson vividly bemoaned that 'the cold narrow minds, the confined ideas, the bygone prejudices of the society are hardly conceivable; books there are none, nor music, and as to pictures! – the Lord deliver us from such! The people do not know what a picture is'.<sup>31</sup> Of course this attitude has never been universal – L.M. Montgomery explicitly defends Canadian culture throughout the *Emily* trilogy – and has been increasingly challenged since the latter half of the twentieth-century. Still, this negativity remains a persistently undermining force, and reveals much about Canada's cultural lack of confidence – especially in comparison to America and the United Kingdom – and it continues to constitute a burden upon Canadian writers.

It also continues to be utilised by those wishing to dismiss Canadian writing, and not only in an academic context. In March 2006, *The Guardian's* online book club's 'world literature tour' moved to a consideration of Canadian authors and books that provoked heated and lengthy debate. A typical observation came from 'Amanda', who admitted that 'I actually didn't realise quite a number of authors on my book shelves actually came from Canada (or I did but I never really think about their nationalities until now)'.<sup>32</sup> Other posters, however, both British and Canadian, clearly *had* been thinking about national identity in literature, and their conclusions were certainly interesting as a means of understanding popular perceptions (and misconceptions) about the Canadian literary scene. For example, 'Laurence38' complained that Canada has a 'self-congratulatory, back-patting artist culture' and characterised Canadian novels as:

[waxing] nostalgic about growing up in tough times with tough winters and tough work, but there are of course, endearingly eccentric grandmas and grandpas uncles and brothers etc, and little Billy threw up before his

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<sup>30</sup> Frances Brooke, *The History of Emily Montague* (1796) <<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/16300>> (10/06/09).

<sup>31</sup> Anna Jameson, *The Diary of an Ennuyée* (1826) <<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/18049>> (10/06/09).

<sup>32</sup> 'Amanda' *The Guardian Online* March 2006 <<http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/culturevulture/archives/2006/mar/21/whithercanada>> (15/04/09).

wedding, but ol' Granddaddy Groggins died before his time, sigh, weep,  
laugh...<sup>33</sup>

'Pat Taylor' is similarly scathing: 'most Canadian lit is either banal or pretentious. However in a country with a population that finds watching figure skating interesting one should not be surprised to find that any story that evokes emotion is lauded as a Masterpeice [sic]'.<sup>34</sup> These complaints are typical of a certain school of thought, refusing to see there might be more to Canadian literature than 'snow banks and maple syrup'.<sup>35</sup> However, there were plenty of respondents who disagreed with this rather damning verdict, and were vocal in defence of Canadian writers. The range discussed included all the usual suspects as well as a range of more unusual choices; Mavis Gallant, Mordecai Richler, Douglas Coupland, Dionne Brand, Susan Swan, Barbara Gowdy and Lisa Moore, among many others. All three writers considered in this study were favourably mentioned. 'A.C.' gushed that Alice Munro is 'Surely one of the finest writers living today'<sup>36</sup> and 'Sabrina' opined Munro had 'really mastered the short story genre'.<sup>37</sup> A nostalgic 'Nicole4' made sure that L.M. Montgomery was included in the debate, saying that she 'never gets old'<sup>38</sup> and recommending two of her lesser known works, *The Story Girl* and *The Golden Road*. And 'Melissa out West' praised Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*; 'The fact I was forced to read it in high school did not prevent me from being moved by the destructively proud protagonist'.<sup>39</sup>

One of the most striking features was how many of the books mentioned were written in either the twentieth or twenty-first centuries. I here posit that Canada's literary insecurity appears closely related to popular understanding of Canadian literature as a

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<sup>33</sup> 'Laurence 38' *The Guardian Online* (15/04/09).

<sup>34</sup> 'Pat Taylor' *The Guardian Online* (15/04/09).

<sup>35</sup> 'Anonymous' *The Guardian Online* (15/04/09).

<sup>36</sup> 'A.C.' *The Guardian Online* (15/04/09).

<sup>37</sup> 'Sabrina' *The Guardian Online* (15/04/09).

<sup>38</sup> 'Nicole4' *The Guardian Online* (15/04/09).

<sup>39</sup> 'Melissa out West' *The Guardian Online* (15/04/09).

relatively recent phenomenon. In 1991, Lynette Hunter identified that the ‘one consistent motif in Canadian studies over the last three decades has been the discussion of the search for ‘Canadian identity’’.<sup>40</sup> And indeed, the academic study of Canadian Literature is itself an arguably twentieth-century development. In his 1990 article ‘The Canonization of Canadian Literature: An Inquiry Into Value’, Robert Lecker asserts that Canadian literature ‘was canonized in fewer than twenty years’,<sup>41</sup> and that prior to World War Two, the study of Canadian literature was so unorganised and so widely dispersed that the subject of Canadian literature did not even appear on any school curriculum. Lecker highlights milestones towards the conceptualisation of Canadian literature such as McClelland and Stewart’s publication of a *New Canadian Library* series from 1957 that began the process of defining texts as explicitly Canadian, the 1965 publication of the first *Literary History of Canada*, a seminal text in terms of Canadian studies, and the University of Calgary’s conference on the Canadian novel in 1978, that led to the compilation of a list of one hundred of the ‘most important’<sup>42</sup> Canadian novels. While one might raise objections to Lecker’s chosen criteria, as Frank Davey does when he asks ‘Is a school curriculum the only possible context for the attainment of literary “legitimacy”? Can there be no canon if a literature has no curriculum, educational publishers, or “academic critics”, or if it has not been institutionalised as an “independent” subject?’<sup>43</sup> – or one might even challenge the insistence on prioritising the notion of the ‘canon’ itself – it is hard to deny that the chronology Lecker provides represents a field of study that has only developed as a discipline in the twentieth century.

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<sup>40</sup> Lynette Hunter, ‘Introduction’, Coral Ann Howells & Lynette Hunter (Eds.) *Narrative Strategies in Canadian Literature*, (Bristol: Open University Press, 1991) p1 (pp1-23).

<sup>41</sup> Robert Lecker ‘The Canonization of Canadian Literature: An Inquiry Into Value’ *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.16 No.3 (Spring, 1990) p656 (pp656-671).

<sup>42</sup> Lecker, ‘Canonization’, p658.

<sup>43</sup> Frank Davey, ‘Critical Response: Canadian Canons’, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.16 No.3 (Spring, 1990) p672 (pp 672-681).



Of course, as W.J. Keith has pointed out, it is not simply that the study of Canadian literature is a relatively young field; it is that our conception of Canada is as a relatively young country. He describes Canada as:

A country which began to come together as a stable political unit in 1867 and whose present boundaries were established as recently as 1949. A country whose written history spans no more than 500 years [...] and whose English literary tradition can be traced back no further than the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>44</sup>

This problematic understanding of Canada as a 'new' nation necessitates an acknowledgement of Canada's unusual position in terms of post-colonial politics. So often, post-colonial debate is focused on and driven by the literatures of India, Africa and the Caribbean that it is easy to negate the role of countries that are both 'Western' and 'Empire', both 'Colonised' and 'Colonial' – countries and literatures such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada. These countries that were colonised as settlements rather than conquests occupy an unusually dual position when thinking about post-colonial literature, and this factor is an integral component of Canada's complex literary identity.<sup>45</sup>

E.D. Blodgett has identified this as 'a complex known as 'New World' literature'<sup>46</sup> and suggests that this identity continues to be hugely influential in characterising Canadian literature. He notes the ambiguous nature of Canada's international relationships with America and Europe, in terms of politics, geography and literature. As a 'New World' literature, Canadian literature is allied with American traditions, and yet

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<sup>44</sup> W.J. Keith, *Canadian Literature in English*, (New York: Longman, 1985) p1.

<sup>45</sup> Further information on different aspects of Canada as a post-colonial nation can be found in Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literatures* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1989), David H. Flaherty & Frank E. Manning (Eds.) *The Beaver Bites Back: American Popular Culture in Canada* (Montreal: McGill – Queen's University Press, 1993) and Justin D. Edwards *Gothic Canada: Reading the Spectre of a National Literature* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005).

<sup>46</sup> E.D. Blodgett, 'Canadian Literature Is Comparative Literature', *College English*, Vol. 50 No.8, (December, 1998) p904 (pp904-911).

there are crucial differences that can be understood by remembering the historical context:

They ['New World' literatures] all share a number of themes; the myth of the new world, the image of an apparently uninhabited land, the role of nature, and, as a contrast, nostalgia for the old world. Canada, however, differs from other American countries in the degree and character of her relationship with Europe.<sup>47</sup>

Canadian literature is then located in a shifting and subtle territory; neither American nor European in allegiance or nature, yet undeniably influenced by and recognisable as sharing characteristics of both. And despite the popular myth that Canada has no literary culture, from this complex alliance, David Carroll and Michael Wheeler have discerned the emergence of a national literary identity, 'independent of both parent and neighbour'.<sup>48</sup> It is this uniquely Canadian literary voice that comprises the focus of my study, and can be heard clearly in the texts considered within it.

A further significant component of this identity is to be found in remembering Canada's status as a bilingual nation, with two official languages. While multiple languages coexist in almost all nations (e.g. Spanish and English in America), the officially bilingual policy of Canada is unusual, and perhaps indicates a national predisposition towards the co-existence of multiple identities. While this project focuses exclusively on three English language writers, there is nevertheless the need for awareness that the English language co-exists with Canada's French language and literature. Furthermore, there is an aspect of Canadian linguistic identity that is at once unofficial and foundational: 'the presence of native literatures, both Inuit and Amerindian, which are for the most part oral but nonetheless viable within the

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<sup>47</sup> Blodgett, 'Canadian Literature', p904.

<sup>48</sup> David Carroll & Michael Wheeler, 'Introduction', W.J. Keith, *Canadian Literature in English* (New York: Longman, 1985), px (ppi-xvii).

account'.<sup>49</sup> This has particular implications for English language Canadian writers. As ever with post-colonial literatures, the search for identity is complicated by the perennial issue of how to define a separate and autonomous identity when the debate is to be conducted in a 'foreign' language. If it is strange to think of English-speaking Canada in terms more commonly applied to the literature that has emerged, for example, from India, then perhaps the strangeness only underlines the necessity of the consideration. What are the distinguishing features of Canadian literature as opposed to English or American literatures? And how can these be clarified when the three share a common language?

Little wonder then that Canadian literary identity is so often defined in terms of opposition and difference – what it is not, as much as what it is. As Hunter has it: 'Contemporary studies view the issue not as the construction of an absent identity, but as the articulation of a distinct identity that has been suppressed by or subject to dominant traditions and conventions from elsewhere, particularly Europe or the United States.'<sup>50</sup> Through these questions of identity, a sense continues to emerge of a positive Canadian literary voice – challenging, persistent and diverse. There is also a sense that this voice is gendered, and that unusually, this voice is female. Firstly, to qualify that observation, I find myself in the rare and almost absurd position of emphasising that this sense of a female literary voice is not in any way intended to diminish or negate the work of male Canadian authors, poets and playwrights: Mordecai Richler, Michael Ondaatje, Yann Martel, Leonard Cohen, David Adams Richards, Drew Hayden Taylor, Alistair MacLeod, Frank Parker Day, Richard Van Kamp, to highlight just a few. Rather, the quantity *and* quality of work by Canadian men makes the female ascendancy over and tone of Canadian literature all the more remarkable.

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<sup>49</sup> Blodgett, 'Canadian Literature', p905.

<sup>50</sup> Hunter, 'Introduction', p1.

To begin to outline and support this proposal, I would first turn back to the online book club, as a simple and succinct demonstration of how women writers take centre stage in the popular conception of Canadian literature. Not only do women dominate the list, but also the levels of individual recognition and awareness are significantly higher than for the male authors. For example, seven contributors mentioned Michael Ondaatje, a prestigious writer on an international as well as a national scale. But Mavis Gallant had thirteen mentions, Carol Shields sixteen, Alice Munro eleven, and Margaret Atwood was the topic of over thirty posts (even though not all of them were complimentary). Though by no means a definitive survey, it does indicate the lie of the land, when even a casual talk-board with no 'feminist agenda' reveals this pattern. Even in earlier decades, when it would be unrealistic to expect a similar division of recognition, it is striking just how many women writers are included in even the most conventional selections of literature. For example, a 1926 children's anthology *The Voice of Canada* features sixteen women writers – just over a third of the total contributions. For a text of that era, that claims to offer a comprehensive and inspiring overview of Canadian writing, it is not a bad allocation, even if the Biographical Notes do insist on clarifying that L.M. Montgomery is '(Mrs Ewan Macdonald)'.<sup>51</sup>

Indeed, looking back at the history of Canadian literature in English reveals a striking progression of successful female writers, whose careers reinforce the view that Canadian Literature has been primarily defined by women. As noted previously, it is generally agreed that the first novel to be written in and about Canada was by and about a woman; Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague*. Brooke was a prolific writer, composing poetry, plays and opera as well as novels, and the Quebec setting of *The History of Emily Montague* was inspired by a five year stay in Canada. As Hammill has charted, the setting of this text is far more than a backdrop location, and Brooke skilfully used it to explore

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<sup>51</sup> A.M. Stephen (Ed.) *The Voice of Canada: Canadian Prose and Poetry* (Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1926), p138.

her social and sexual concerns. For example, she compared the positions of European and First Nation women, highlighting their shared status (or lack thereof) as commodities on the marriage market: 'this multilayered exploration of Canadian subject-matter attests to her perception of its rich literary possibilities'.<sup>52</sup> And these possibilities were, of course, developed further by the Strickland sisters – better known as Catherine Parr Traill and Susanna Moodie, who both emigrated from the UK to Canada in 1832. Traill was primarily a non-fiction writer, as well as a talented natural historian, and her keen observational talents are arguably displayed to their best advantage in her work on Canada's animal and plant life, including *Canadian Wild Flowers* (1868). But she is perhaps best known for her pragmatic and positive attitude to her new life in the colonies, which she described in *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836) and *The Female Emigrant's Guide* (1854; reprinted as *The Canadian Settler's Guide*). Traill established a rational and commonsense authorial persona that has persistently influenced the perception of her writing. Meanwhile Moodie, with her romantically influenced vocabulary of the sublime and her developing interest in spiritualism, occupies a darker stratum of Canadian culture. Although much of her writing, such as *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852) and *Life in the Clearings* (1853) ostensibly deals with the same themes of relocation and exploration as her sister's, the tone is complicated by her heightened literary sensibility and her altogether more dramatic approach.

Elsewhere, early Canadian women writers assert themselves across a variety of forms and disciplines. The poet Isabella Valency Crawford, author of *Old Spookses' Pass, Malcolm's Katie, and Other Poems* (1884) emigrated from Ireland as a child in 1858, and her poetry is extensively influenced by her Canadian upbringing. While assessments of her work vary, she has been cited as 'the first significant poet within the English-Canadian tradition to recognise the rich treasure of image and reference to be found in the life and

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<sup>52</sup> Hammill, *Literary Culture*, p16.

culture of the Indian [sic] peoples'<sup>53</sup> and while her treatment of First-Nations traditions is not unproblematic in terms of creating a flawed mythology, it nevertheless represents an early attempt at engaging with other Canadian cultures. And in the closing years of the nineteenth-century, Sara Jeannette Duncan established herself as a successful and popular correspondent with the *Washington Post* and the *Toronto Globe*, delivering acute and insightful comparisons between American, English and Canadian literary cultures. Hammill has charted how she developed upon this journalistic background with her novel *The Imperialist* (1904), where 'her subtle criticisms of the "colonial" and "philistine" attitudes and "unliterary" tastes of her compatriots coexist [...] with an affirmation of her country's creative potential and future greatness'.<sup>54</sup> These women, among others, represent the first generations of Canadian writers, who not only established the foundations of Canadian literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries, but also facilitated the progress of later generations, who could deliver upon the promise for greatness that Duncan perceived at the beginning of the twentieth-century. Their work contributes towards an enriching and supportive tradition, as observed by Howells: 'Contemporary women's writing in Canada is the culmination of a strong literary tradition and one of which modern writers are very conscious of as reassuring evidence of their creative origins in their own country'.<sup>55</sup> As Howells says, there is a sense of reassurance for the female Canadian writer in having such distinguished predecessors. They seem to offer a reminder that Canadian literature has never been a male preserve, even in its earliest conceptions.

This developing sense of female dominance and eloquence in defining the Canadian literary voice has been recognized and analysed through many critical approaches. Howells addresses this in terms of identity. In her book *Private and Fictional*

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<sup>53</sup> Keith, *Canadian Literature*, p31.

<sup>54</sup> Hammill, *Literary Culture*, pxiv.

<sup>55</sup> Coral Ann Howells, *Private and Fictional Words*, p2.

*Words* she begins with ‘an attempt to answer the question repeatedly asked outside Canada about Canadian fiction: “Why are there so many good Canadian women writers?”’<sup>56</sup>, locating her response in the context of identities:

The answers to such a question reveal interesting similarities between the search for visibility and identity so characteristic of women’s fiction and the Canadian search for a distinctive cultural self-image [...] the problematic definition of feminine and Canadian identity in its subjective sense and its objective recognition by others.<sup>57</sup>

This comparison tellingly suggests that the complexities and nuances of Canadian literary identity are somehow sympathetic with the politics of gender identity that are central to the work of so many women writers. The literary traditions of America and Europe are frequently understood as concrete and monumental, enshrined in and defined by the masculine. The alternative created by Canadian writers is a less stable, more flexible sense of identity, without the formidable foundations of a patriarchal canon, and thereby offering a particular affinity to the thematic concerns of women writers whose work reflects a similar struggle to find an autonomous identity and an alternative means of self-determination:

The feminine insistence on a need for revision and a resistance to open confrontation or revolution might be said to characterize Canada’s national image at home and abroad, while women’s stories about procedures for self-discovery which are as yet (as always?) incomplete may be seen to parallel the contemporary Canadian situation.<sup>58</sup>

Hunter also perceives a correlation at work, and sees debates about national and gendered identity as ‘parallel strands’, enhancing and counter-pointing each other

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<sup>56</sup> Howells, *Private and Fictional Words*, p21.

<sup>57</sup> Howells, *Private and Fictional Words*, p2.

<sup>58</sup> Howells, *Private and Fictional Words*, p3.

through any consideration of Canadian literature: 'Both strands can be seen as attempts to find a voice amid a set of conventions and traditions that do not necessarily encourage them to speak'.<sup>59</sup> This emerging sense of parallel dialogues is crucial to appreciating the nature of the relationship between national and female identities. This association is not about simplifying or generalising, casting Canada as a 'feminine' nation or women as a 'colonised' gender. It is not about forcing two complex schools of critical thought into proximity and hoping in vain that two problematic issues might just solve each other. Rather than a direct equation, it is more about identifying a sympathy between approaches, and finding a site of contact rather than contraction. That this site will be inherently dynamic and destabilised in nature further highlights the affinity between these issues, and the omnipresent difficulty in negotiating between them.

This approach may be widely utilised, but has its inevitable detractors. Critics like Keith appear fundamentally uncomfortable about including any feminist dimension in a discussion about Canadian literary identity. Referring to Atwood's *The Edible Woman* (1969), he dismissively remarks that 'On first publication it was easily assimilated into the literature of feminist protest, but this severely underestimates the extent of its relevance',<sup>60</sup> as if to be taken seriously, the text must be cleansed of the contaminating influence of feminist politics. Other critics, such as Sylvia Söderlind, raise more sophisticated objections to the correlation of nation and gender:

While Canada has a good share of strong female writers, the implicit argument that this is a reflection of Canada's marginality begs the question. The circular logic that allows for the equation of the Canadian, the feminine and the marginal seems to me to be predicated on a catachrestic essentializing of the feminine as marginal.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Hunter, 'Introduction', p1.

<sup>60</sup> Keith, *Canadian Literature*, p162.

<sup>61</sup> Sylvia Söderlind, 'The Contest of Marginalities,' *Essays on Canadian Writing* 56 (Fall 1995) p101.



It is a concern that merits consideration, although I would posit that the marginal does not necessarily have to be read as subservient or deprived; there are few more blandly damning phrases in the cultural vocabulary than 'mainstream'. And just because the equation of the Canadian and the feminine may have been catalysed by a sense of affinity rooted in marginalisation, it does not automatically follow that the development stops there. Indeed, there is an inherent risk in perceiving Canadian women's writing as irrevocably 'mainstream', which is possibly far more dangerous than assuming it is marginal. Therefore, a final warning that must be taken into account comes from Atwood, who highlights the risk of growing too complacent in the association of Canadian literature with a culture of thriving female authorship: 'Why are there so many Canadian women writers? Sometimes this question is asked accusingly, or plaintively, or despairingly, as in 'Why are there so many mosquitoes?' For these questioners, *some* is too many. There are only 'some' by the way. There are not, for instance, half.'<sup>62</sup> Despite this note of caution, I would maintain that the relationship between national and female identity is not just a characteristic of Canadian literature; it is one of its active strengths, and has produced some of its finest texts. Among those are the texts where concerns about gender, nation and identity are fused together by the narrative pattern of the *Künstlerroman*.

For it is important to remember that the *Künstlerroman* is a highly literary narrative mode, and its potential for intertextual dynamics is especially revealing in the context of Canadian women's writing, where as well as a means of connecting to other women writers, intertextuality is also a means of connecting with national identity. Textual reference then serves as an act of tribute as well as re-interpretation, and the act of narration permits a better understanding of literary heritage: 'Only through story-telling can connections with the past be realised, for inheritance comes to possess reality only

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<sup>62</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) p89. Italics in original.

when it is re-imagined and when history and legend are so closely interwoven'.<sup>63</sup> Especially significant in terms of this is the element of intertextuality and awareness between the writers considered here, and how this can overlap. Munro has often spoken in interview of the influence the *Emily* trilogy had on her as a child, and of the affinity she felt with a character who was creative and passionate about literature. Like Montgomery, Munro also cites the influence of the Brontës. Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* is strikingly similar in many ways to Laurence's *A Bird in the House*. All three writers have been hugely influential both in Canadian literature and beyond national borders. These connections develop into a sense of continuity and cohesion between texts, helping to build up an understanding of how the *Künstlerroman* genre can be a narrative that extends from the protagonist and incorporates the creative progress of a wider literature, testifying to the way in which women write themselves into becoming.

### **The Writers: L.M. Montgomery, Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence**

Having established the overarching pattern of female ascendancy in twentieth-century Canadian writing, I now shift my focus to a more detailed appraisal of the three individual writers at the centre of this study, and the texts that best demonstrate the female *Künstlerroman* in action. This section will briefly introduce and contextualise their careers, and outline the specific importance of their texts as *Künstlerroman* narratives.

L.M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery is, paradoxically, at once the best and the least known of the writers considered here. Born in 1874 on Prince Edward Island, she was raised there by her maternal grandparents. After studying literature at Dalhousie University, she found work as a schoolteacher, but persisted with her ambitions to write. Between 1897 and 1907, she had over one hundred short stories published in various magazines, and found fame with the *Anne* series that began in 1908. Montgomery

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<sup>63</sup> Howells, *Private and Fictional Words*, p20.

married in 1911 and had three sons, and supported the family through her prolific and successful writing career.<sup>64</sup> By the time of her death in 1942, she had completed over five hundred short stories, twenty novels, an autobiography and a collection of poems. She continues to be phenomenally popular and high profile, and yet the spectre of her fame has too frequently overshadowed the more unusual and interesting aspects of her career. It is impossible to ignore the behemoth of Montgomery's reputation. In a Canada Day survey conducted by the Dominion Institution and The Council for Canadian Unity, Montgomery was voted the sixteenth greatest Canadian Hero out of over a thousand potential nominees, and was placed third highest-ranking woman on the list. In a CBC millennium poll, in which viewers voted to determine the most significant events and the most influential Canadians of the century, Montgomery was overwhelmingly elected as the greatest Canadian writer, receiving almost a quarter of all votes polled. Her popularity is undeniable, and her work inspires immense devotion, creating a massive demand not just for books, but for films, television adaptations, musicals, stage plays, cartoons, and an array of accompanying memorabilia.<sup>65</sup> In twenty-first-century Canada and on Prince Edward Island in particular, Montgomery is not just a writer: she is an industry. Yet despite, or quite possibly perhaps of this mass appeal, Montgomery's fiction has been critically overlooked, and often excluded from studies of Canadian literature, until an increase in interest in the later decades of the twentieth century.<sup>66</sup> As Atwood (incidentally the fifth greatest Canadian writer in the CBC poll) admits, '*Anne of Green Gables* is one of those books you feel almost guilty liking because so many other people

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<sup>64</sup> Montgomery is the only one of the three writers considered in this study to publish exclusively under her maiden name, indicating the importance of the reputation she had established prior to her marriage.

<sup>65</sup> For more on the Montgomery memorabilia industry, see Jeannette Lynes, 'Consumable Avonlea: The Commodification of the Green Gables Mythology', Irene Gammel (Ed.) *Making Avonlea: L.M. Montgomery and Popular Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), p268-279.

<sup>66</sup> For example, W.J. Keith's *Canadian Literature in English* (1985) locates itself as a comprehensive overview of Canadian writing, without one mention of the nation's most successful literary export.

like it as well. If it's that popular, you feel, it can't possibly be good, or good for you'.<sup>67</sup> Atwood's comment provides an indication of how synonymous Montgomery's name has become with that of her first heroine, the irrepressible and romantic Anne Shirley, who has in the notorious phrase of Canadian journalists 'become the closest any Canadian equivalent can get to Mickey Mouse'.<sup>68</sup> This somewhat dubious compliment denotes the level of cultural saturation which Anne has achieved, as well as explaining why Montgomery's books have become something of a guilty pleasure in the eyes of readers like Atwood.

However, it is crucial to separate the work from the reputation, and to look more closely at Montgomery's actual writing. She dealt with themes of bereavement, betrayal, transgressive sexualities, intrigue, scandal and the supernatural – not quite Mickey Mouse's usual forte. She actively participated in contemporary debates concerning Canadian culture and literature, and held strong personal opinions about what Canadian literature should be. Yet these achievements and attitudes remain persistently overshadowed by her creation, as Anne Shirley, or the popular conception of her, tends to dominate any discussion of Montgomery. This study focuses on a less ubiquitous Montgomery creation, the darker and altogether more difficult Emily Byrd Starr, eponymous heroine of the trilogy *Emily of New Moon*, *Emily Climbs* and *Emily's Quest*. The *Emily* trilogy explores the development of a young writer, from precocious child to talented woman. It is a detailed and highly personal portrayal that operates on multiple levels of literary reference and intertextuality. Like the *Anne* series, the *Emily* trilogy is practically prescribed reading for Canadian girls, but has a particular appeal for those who go on to become creative women. As Irene Gammel observes, Emily 'has won a special place in the lives of today's Canadian women writers, editors, academics and

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<sup>67</sup> Margaret Atwood, 'Reflection Piece – Revisiting *Anne*', Irene Gammel & Elizabeth Epperly (Eds.) *L.M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) p222 (pp222-226).

<sup>68</sup> Geoff Pevere & Grieg Dymond, *Mondo Canuck: A Canadian Pop Culture Odyssey* (Toronto: Prentice Hall Canada, 1996) p13.

journalists, including Margaret Atwood, Lillian Nattel, Alice Munro, Jane Urquhart, Kit Pearson, Elizabeth Epperly, Ann Shortell and Vall Ross'.<sup>69</sup> Something about the trilogy strikes a chord of recognition with the reader who loves reading, writing and words. Atwood has said of the *Anne* books that '*Anne* is a truism. Readers of my generation, and of several generations before or since, do not think of *Anne* as 'written'. It has simply always been there'.<sup>70</sup> While the *Emily* books are a less pervasive presence in Canadian fiction, perhaps they too have always been there for later generations of Canadian women writers, testifying to the career of a remarkable predecessor.

Montgomery began work on the *Emily* trilogy in 1920, having grown frustrated with the *Anne* series that had made her reputation. As she completed what she had every intention should be the last 'Anne' book, *Rilla of Ingleside*, Montgomery recorded a 'dark and deadly vow' in her journal that she would not return to the red-haired dynasty of Avonlea. Even as she worked towards the conclusion of *Rilla*, she was increasingly preoccupied with new ambitions: 'she had already been brooding up a new dark-haired, purple-eyed heroine named Emily, and she wanted to write about her'.<sup>71</sup> Yet even as this new creation materialised and developed, Montgomery was torn: 'I am becoming classified as a 'writer for young people' and that only – I want to write a book dealing with grown-up creatures – a psychological study of one human being's life'.<sup>72</sup> In deciding to proceed with Emily, Montgomery apparently deferred this ambition until her specifically 'adult' novels, *The Blue Castle* (1926) and *A Tangled Web* (1931). Yet this classification undermines the full significance of the *Emily* trilogy. Through Emily, Montgomery offered an explicit portrait of female authorship and creativity. In this latter

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<sup>69</sup> Irene Gammel, 'Safe Pleasures for Girls: L.M. Montgomery's Erotic Landscapes', Irene Gammel (Ed.) *Making Avonlea: L.M. Montgomery and Popular Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), p120 (pp114-131).

<sup>70</sup> Atwood, 'Reflection Piece – Revisiting *Anne*', p223.

<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass: L.M. Montgomery's Heroines and the Pursuit of Romance* (London: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p129.

<sup>72</sup> L.M. Montgomery, *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery Volume II: 1910 – 1921*, Mary Henley Rubio & Elizabeth Waterson (Eds.) (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), p390.

series, Montgomery confronts the social and cultural pressures to which female creativity is expected to conform, articulating a complex double narrative that both upholds the conventional pattern of a woman's life – and a woman's life-writing – whilst also undermining this pattern through a subversive acknowledgement of its limits. While Montgomery does frame Emily's narrative as a journey from childhood to marriage, this plotline is clearly secondary to the narrative of Emily's artistic progress – a Canadian *Künstlerroman*, in which I will argue that artistic subjectivity is prioritized over romantic subjectivity in the creation of the female self. This analysis will posit that, rather than deferring her 'psychological study of one human being's life' until after the *Emily* books, Montgomery in fact never accomplished it as deftly and revealingly as she did within them. And by designating that 'one human being' as female, Canadian and a writer, she provides a complex and multifaceted testimony to her own experience: 'a fascinating double portrait [...] of reading women reading and writing themselves as women'.<sup>73</sup>

My reading of the trilogy will chart Montgomery's psychological crafting of Emily's development into a determined and resilient Canadian writer. It will discuss Emily's creative progress as the force by which she defines herself, that is, as she 'writes herself out' into existence. Drawing upon previous studies, such as those by Elizabeth Epperly, Kate Lawson and Marie Campbell, I will question their shared emphasis on the male characters within the trilogy, and explore the limitations of the most popular verdicts critically available on the conclusion. Montgomery subverts the romance genre and endorses a female *Künstlerroman*, through the most crucial validations of Emily's chosen career coming from such powerful female characters as Ilse Burnley, Janet Royal and Aunt Elizabeth. In stressing Montgomery's emphasis on the female, the professional and the personal, rather than the male, the romantic and the social forces that influence Emily, this reading will map both the dual construction of a fictional character and a

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<sup>73</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p145.

literary career – both driven by the desire for self-expression and artistic subjectivity – and the meta-fictional and self-referential writing into existence of a national writer in both Emily and Montgomery.

The second writer considered in this study is Alice Munro. Her literary career has spanned over four decades, seeing her public perception progress from that of a ‘shy housewife’<sup>74</sup> to ‘the finest living writer of short stories’.<sup>75</sup> She has established herself as one of Canada’s most successful and respected authors, with her work frequently and tellingly compared to that of such canonical literary icons as James Joyce, Anton Chekhov, Guy de Maupassant and Gustave Flaubert.<sup>76</sup> Munro’s work is widely admired by literary peers, including Atwood, John Updike and A.S. Byatt. She has thrice won the Governor General’s Literary Award (1968, 1978 and 1986), the Canada-Australia Literary Prize in 1977, the WH Smith Literary Award in 1995, the Book Critics’ Circle Fiction Award in 1999, the Giller Prize in 2004, as well as a Booker nomination in 1980 and the International Booker Prize in 2009 – an impressive collection of accolades that reflects both her critical and popular appeal. Yet despite this litany of prestige, there remains a somewhat marginal quality to her reputation which journalist Louise France is not alone in linking to her chosen style of writing: ‘Alice Munro doesn’t have the profile of more bombastic authors and the fact that she’s always written short stories has affirmed her Cinderella status’.<sup>77</sup>

Born Alice Laidlaw, she grew up on the outskirts of Wingham, Ontario in 1931, and the marginalized rural setting of her childhood has consistently informed her fiction. Throughout her early life she read obsessively and extensively, later acknowledging that

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<sup>74</sup> Aida Edemariam, ‘Riches of a double life’, *The Guardian Online*, 4<sup>th</sup> October 2003, <<http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0105542600.html>> (10/12/08).

<sup>75</sup> Edemariam, ‘Riches of a double life’ (10/12/08).

<sup>76</sup> Coral Ann Howells, *Alice Munro: Contemporary World Writers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p24.

<sup>77</sup> Louise France, ‘Mistress of all she surveys’ *The Observer Online*, 6<sup>th</sup> February 2005, <<http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0140665300.html>> (10/12/08).

‘books seem[ed] to me to be magic, and I wanted to be part of the magic’.<sup>78</sup> She studied on a scholarship at the University of Western Ontario, where she made her first steps towards declaring herself a writer, and published her first short story ‘Dimensions of a Shadow’ in the university magazine. She married her first husband, Jim Munro, in 1951, and moved to Vancouver. Munro combined housekeeping with writing, a duality of role that she has described as a ‘double life’.<sup>79</sup> During this period she had twenty-one individual stories published in various magazines and anthologies. In 1968, Munro published her first collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, the culmination of fifteen years of intensive creativity. This collection earned her the Governor General’s award for the first time, and Munro was applauded for her sensitivity to the nuances of women’s lives. Already, especially in the outstanding ‘The Peace of Utrecht’ and the title story ‘Dance of the Happy Shades’, her distinctive authorial voice was emerging; sophisticated, subtle, and deceptively simple. Since then, Munro has published extensively: dozens of stories in the *New Yorker* magazine, and over ten collections, with one appearing regularly every four or five years. Now in her seventies, and living in Ontario with her second husband Gerald Fremlin, Munro continues to write. Her most recent work, *The View From Castle Rock*, ‘a lightly fictionalised family memoir’<sup>80</sup> was released to extremely positive reviews in November 2006. Praised as ‘an act of salvage rather than appropriation [...] a memoir that has taken a breath, and expanded itself beyond genre and beyond the confines of one life’<sup>81</sup> *The View From Castle Rock* is the latest reworking of the themes that have permeated Munro’s career; family, landscape, community, memory. Above all, it is concerned with identity, and is engaged in an act of testimony to and definition of how Canadian female identity has developed over the generations.

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<sup>78</sup> Edemariam, ‘Riches of a double life’ (10/12/08).

<sup>79</sup> Edemariam, ‘Riches of a double life’ (10/12/08).

<sup>80</sup> Hilary Mantel, ‘Book Review’, *The Guardian Online*, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2006, <<http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0194463200html>> (10/12/08)

<sup>81</sup> Mantel, ‘Book Review’, (10/12/08).



This study will focus almost exclusively on two of Munro's earlier collections, *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?*. Whilst creative protagonists feature in several of Munro's stories – notable examples include 'The Office' (1968) 'Lichen' (1986) and 'Meneseteung' (1990) – these texts constitute her most complex and sustained negotiations with the *Künstlerroman* narrative pattern. These two volumes each feature an individual female protagonist, whose growth is serialised throughout the stories. *Lives of Girls and Women* is narrated in the first person by Del Jordan, while *Who Do You Think You Are?* is a third person construct that observes the development of Rose. Because these two collections are unique among Munro's work in deploying the same characters through each story, their precise classification has caused years of critical consternation, especially in the case of the more obviously linear *Lives of Girls and Women*. Blodgett has labelled both *Lives* and *Who Do You Think You Are?* as novels,<sup>82</sup> whilst Keith opts for the vague neutrality of 'longer fictions'.<sup>83</sup> This debate may have its aficionados, but for the purposes of this study, classifying the formal structure of Munro's fiction is not the primary issue. The real interest of *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?* is in reading them as further examples of the female Canadian *Künstlerroman*.

Each fiction charts not only the development of the woman, but of the artist: Del is a budding writer, and Rose a professional actress. Rose is the only non-writer among the protagonists in the study, and her showier, more demonstrative brand of creativity offers an interesting glimpse into a different style of artistic development. While their eventual careers are different, Del and Rose both come from deprived rural backgrounds. Their creative talents define their characters, differentiating them from their peers and determining the paths they will take away from their communities. The two fictions follow them through their lives as these talents develop, and each offers a succession of insights into the problematic condition of the creative woman. The stories of Del and

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<sup>82</sup> E.D. Blodgett, *Alice Munro* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1985), p5.

<sup>83</sup> Keith, *Canadian Literature*, p265.

Rose thus constitute a repeated treatment of the *Künstlerroman* theme, two alternative possibilities of how female creativity might develop from significantly similar circumstances. Munro's decision to re-work such a similar initial premise has met with charges of repetition and lack of range. Keith's condescending verdict is typical of this school: '*Who Do You Think You Are?* suffers by comparison to the earlier books since the pattern and attitudes are already familiar. West Hanratty is suspiciously similar to Jubilee, and Rose seems no more than a coarsened reworking of Del'.<sup>84</sup> It is in some ways a difficult pronouncement to refute – the 'patterns and attitudes' of the two fictions *are* similar. The term 'coarsened' is unfortunate (Keith appears uncomfortable with Rose's frank and unromantic sexuality) but Rose *is* in many ways a 'reworking' of Del. Yet that is precisely the point of Munro's achievement; not a repetition, but a reinterpretation. She exploits the similarities of her fictions only to surprise and unsettle the reader by drawing out the differences. Ildikó de Papp Carrington observes that 'when Munro mines the same material by re-exploring a theme, she does not repeat herself [...] she does something quite new, discovers something only glimpsed before'.<sup>85</sup> *Who Do You Think You Are?* is a darker, starker, more brutal work than *Lives of Girls and Women*, at once more stylised and more cynical, and while each is a stand-alone work, a comparative reading permits a fuller, more multi-faceted insight into Munro's thematic concerns, and her particular approach to the *Künstlerroman* narrative.

The third and final writer included in this analysis is Margaret Laurence, and, like Munro, she is a commanding if not quite central presence in any critical debate about Canadian literature. She was born Margaret Wemyss in 1926, in the small rural town of Neepawa, Manitoba. Educated at Winnipeg United College, she graduated in 1947 to start a career in journalism with the *Winnipeg Citizen*. She married Jack Laurence, a civil

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<sup>84</sup> Keith, *Canadian Literature*, p163.

<sup>85</sup> Ildikó de Papp Carrington, *Controlling the Uncontrollable: The Fictions of Alice Munro* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1989), p98.

engineer, in 1947 and travelled with him when his work took him to Africa, living for two years in Somalia and five in Ghana. Her experiences of Africa shaped and prompted her first efforts at writing fiction, as well as working on translations of Somali literature. Returning to Canada in 1957, she pursued her creative career. Her first novel, *This Side Jordan* (1960) and her collection of short stories *The Tomorrow-Tamer* (1963) are both set in Ghana. She also drew on her time in Africa to publish a non-fiction memoir of the years in Somalia, *The Prophet's Camel Bell* (1963). Laurence separated from her husband, with whom she had two children, in 1962, and relocated to the United Kingdom, where she spent the next decade at work on what would become her greatest achievements in fiction: the *Manawaka* series. These five novels were interconnected through their setting, the fictional prairie town of Manawaka. Each novel in the series offers a different account of female identity, and each identity is specifically peculiar to or dependent upon the rural Canadian location. Whilst she is deservedly best known for the *Manawaka* series, Laurence also published a collection of her essays *Heart of a Stranger* (1976) that included many insights into the development of her fiction, and how she viewed the creative process. She also wrote four books for children. Laurence was twice awarded the prestigious Governor General's Award for fiction, as well as a prolific collection of honorary degrees, and other marks of recognition. After leaving the UK in 1972, Laurence settled in Lakefield, Ontario, until her death in 1987.

The focus of this thesis on the *Künstlerroman* necessitates that I shall only be examining the last two of Laurence's *Manawaka* novels in detail; *A Bird in the House* and *The Diviners*. However, whilst these texts are the ones that demand a detailed reading, and offer the most potential insight into the construction of the Canadian *Künstlerroman*, it is important to locate them within the context of the *Manawaka* series, and to begin with a brief overview of the three novels that precede them. The series began in 1964, with the publication of *The Stone Angel*. The protagonist of this novel is ninety-year-old Hagar

Shipley, daughter of the first generation to settle and establish Manawaka, now living in suburbia with her son Marvin, a veteran of World War One, and his wife Doris. Laurence writes Hagar in the first person, and her characterisation of this embittered and uncompromisingly proud woman is a remarkable achievement. Her portrayal of Hagar is unflinchingly unsentimental; avoiding all the potential clichés about what an old woman is expected to be. *The Stone Angel* is a deceptively simple text, with Hagar's thoughts switching from her past to her present, recalling her losses, reclaiming her loves. Throughout the text, there is the irrevocable sense of a momentum towards death, and the narrative duly culminates with Hagar's dying moments. As a novel, it has the quality of being in itself complete; it lays the foundations for the following texts, but keeps a certain distance, that seems only appropriate to its independent protagonist.

The next works in the series are far more closely interwoven. The protagonist of *A Jest of God* (1966) is Rachel Cameron, while *The Fire Dwellers* (1969) is narrated by Rachel's sister, Stacey MacAindra. Aptly, considering the sister protagonists of the two texts, Laurence found her ideas developing simultaneously, and switched her writing focus between the two, eventually settling into completing *A Jest of God* before *The Fire Dwellers*. As well as the family connection that couples the two texts together, Laurence also signals a generational shift away from Hagar's Manawaka. Rachel and Stacey are of an age to be Hagar's grand-daughters, and in creating them, Laurence moves towards writing about her contemporaries rather than her ancestors. The sisters offer two strikingly different expressions of female identity. Rachel, the younger, is an unmarried schoolteacher aged thirty-four, a virgin, living with her widowed mother and bitterly obedient to the conventions that have stunted her life. Atwood points out that: 'Rachel's prison is so hard for her to get out of because it is made mostly from virtues gone sour: filial devotion, self sacrifice, the concern for appearances advocated by St. Paul, a sense

of duty, the desire to avoid hurting others'.<sup>86</sup> Rachel's unhappiness manifests itself in her attitude to her sister, Stacey, who has 'escaped' to Vancouver, and is married with four children. The characters, like the novels, are connected by letters – Stacey writes home every week, creating an almost rhizomatic bond between the two texts. Rachel responds to these letters with barely-repressed envy and scorn.

Meanwhile, in *The Fire Dwellers*, Stacey emerges from Rachel's resentful caricature, and is revealed as a strong, ardent, edgy woman, desperately attempting to retain some sense of herself as 'Stacey Cameron', struggling to carve out a space in her chaotic domesticity that will allow her this independence. This sense of the chaos that Stacey's restlessness engenders is reflected in the narrative tone of *The Fire-Dwellers*. The first-person shifts between Stacey's thoughts and her self perception, her self-expression and her self-observation. She worries about her children, about her marriage, about her affair, about her drinking, about her lack of formal education. Each sister ends her narrative at a point of hope – Rachel has determined that she will move herself and her unwilling mother to Vancouver, Stacey has connected with her silent daughter Jen – and the sisters themselves are exposed as more similar than their initial appearances suggest. These two parts of the Manawaka cycle offer case studies in female unhappiness, contrasting the different dissatisfactions they feel, and highlighting the need they both have for personal fulfilment, independent of lovers and husbands. If, like *The Stone Angel*, these texts do not offer any form of *Künstlerroman*, they nevertheless are vital components of the series as a whole, and merit consideration when attempting to understand Laurence's achievement in creating her fictional world. It can be argued that it is the themes established in the foundation works of the series that inspire the creative urge of the protagonists who conclude it: Vanessa MacLeod in *A Bird in the House* and Morag Gunn in *The Diviners*.

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<sup>86</sup> Margaret Atwood, 'Afterword', Margaret Laurence, *A Jest of God* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988), p214 (pp211-215).

Laurence famously described *A Bird in the House* as ‘the only semi-autobiographical fiction I have ever written’.<sup>87</sup> The protagonist of this collection is Vanessa MacLeod, a sensitive and intelligent girl, who first appears in the opening story at age ten. She is a precocious child, with a strong creative streak, and a gift of observation. Her articulate, first person narrative offers a personalised testimony to the themes already identified as dominating the Manawaka cycle; inheritance, family ties, and most strikingly, bereavement and loss. Because of Laurence’s description of the text as ‘semi-autobiographical’, there is a critical tendency to assume that Vanessa must inevitably develop into a writer. Some even assume that the narrative persona is in fact Vanessa’s authorial voice, for example David Lucking refers to the text as ‘coming as it does from Vanessa’s pen’.<sup>88</sup> However, I have some reservations about the validity of this assumption. *A Bird in the House* is considered in detail in this study because it has many characteristics of a *Künstlerroman*, but it does not necessarily fulfil all the requirements of one. Vanessa is undoubtedly a creative child, but there is little indication that she fulfils her early potential, and she frequently seems lacking in the necessary ambition and drive. Can *A Bird in the House* then be truly categorised as a *Künstlerroman*? The closure of the narrative offers no definitive answer; there is nothing to say Vanessa is *not* a writer. However, the issue is complicated by considering *A Bird in the House* as a part of the whole Manawaka cycle. Could the cycle sustain its authenticity if two out of five protagonists were to become writers? Keith, working on the assumption that it does, is quick to criticise: ‘it is, one feels, a mistake’.<sup>89</sup> Significantly, *The Diviners* contains no mention of Vanessa as an adult – she is an exact contemporary of Morag, and they are in the same class at school – so if Laurence had wanted to confirm Vanessa as a writer, it would make sense for Morag to have learnt of it. The absence is revealing.

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<sup>87</sup> Margaret Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1980), p5.

<sup>88</sup> David Lucking, *Ancestors and Gods: Margaret Laurence and the Dialectics of Identity* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), p161.

<sup>89</sup> Keith, *Canadian Literature*, p160.

Without wishing to spend too long speculating on the subsequent off-page careers of fictional characters, I would posit that even if Vanessa *writes*, she does not become a professional *writer*, however much that opinion seems to directly contradict Laurence's own assertion that *A Bird in the House* is her work of semi-autobiographical fiction. Just because Laurence is a writer it does not have to follow that a fictionalisation of her childhood self must share her creator's adult success. I read *A Bird in the House* as Laurence's novelisation of familial rather than creative development, a resolution of emotional issues and an acknowledgment of heritage rather than a real exploration of what it means to become a writer. Even if the collection originated with the intention of becoming a *Künstlerroman*, it never quite delivers upon this promise. For Laurence as a writer, I would argue that the topic ultimately required a far more ambitious narrative than that of *A Bird in the House*, and while that text remains valuable to this study, the real focus moves on to the final novel in the Manawaka cycle, and Laurence's true work of *Künstlerroman*: the epic achievement that is *The Diviners*.

Structurally, *The Diviners* is a text that operates on several multi-faceted levels of interconnecting narrative. It is divided into five main sections, with an appendix 'album', where the songs of Jules and Pique are set to music by Ian Cameron. Within the main sections, there are conventional chapters, as well as 'snapshots' (narratives invented for photographs), 'innerfilms' (fantasies and daydreams), 'tales' (stories and histories given to Morag by Christie and Jules) and 'memorybank movies' (vividly recalled scenes from the past, with self-aware titles such as 'Portrait of the Artist as a Pregnant Skivvy'). These devices differentiate between different types of memory and experience, drawing attention to the literary consciousness of the text, and displaying its structural composition. The timeframe is suitably cyclical in nature – the Manawaka cycle culminates in a circular work that spirals between Morag's present and past, and moves towards an open-ended conclusion. It is, as Atwood has it, 'a huge, risky, ambitious and

richly rewarding book'<sup>90</sup>, built, as Hildegard Kuester notes 'on the principle – typical for Canadian writing in general, and for women's writing in particular – of multiplicity. This principle also shows in one of Canada's key self images – the mosaic'.<sup>91</sup> Of course, a mosaic is only successful if the component fragmentary parts can form a coherent picture, and the clearest picture that emerges from *The Diviners* is the characterisation of Morag Gunn. The presentation of Morag is the most detailed of any of the protagonists considered in this study, as Laurence charts forty-seven years of Morag's life, from her deprived childhood to her cynical middle-age. This *Künstlerroman* does not just explore what it takes to become a writer – it explains the effort it takes to stay one – an effort that is not assuaged by success, but motivated onwards by personal ambition.

The study is therefore driven by five narratives, and five creative protagonists: Emily, whose romanticism is underpinned by a streak of stubborn independence, and who, despite her youth at the close of her narrative, has already achieved a real measure of success and recognition; Del, whose maturing talent is encoded into a narrative that deals with her early development; Rose, whose different manifestation of creativity provides a telling contrast between public and private artistry; Vanessa, who never quite delivers on her early promise; and Morag, who demonstrates that the artist remains her own harshest critic throughout her adult life, and success is as much a matter of sustained ambition as public approval. In concluding this overview of the writers and the texts that sustain and motivate this project, it might well appear at this point that there is one writer in particular I have neglected to include in conceptualising how the *Künstlerroman* operates in twentieth-century Canadian women's writing, and her absence from this project certainly merits an explanation: Margaret Atwood – internationally renowned, critically lauded, provocative, popular, divisive – and surely unavoidable in any

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<sup>90</sup> This comment is printed on the front cover of the 1982 McClelland & Stewart edition of *The Diviners*. No further details are provided as to the original source of Atwood's review.

<sup>91</sup> Hildegard Kuester, *The Crafting of Chaos: Narrative Structure in Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel and The Diviners* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1994), p83-84.



discussion of twentieth-century Canadian women's writing. However, having outlined how I understand the *Künstlerroman*, and evaluated how the texts included in the study meet its requirements, there is a valid case for leaving Atwood out of the equation this time.<sup>92</sup>

Atwood has to date written four novels that could possibly be considered as *Künstlerroman* narratives: *Surfacing* (1972), *Lady Oracle* (1976), *Cat's Eye* (1988) and *The Blind Assassin* (2000). The unnamed narrator-protagonist of *Surfacing* is a commercial artist, commissioned to illustrate children's books. The novel is set in the present tense, with very brief allusions to the narrator's childhood. There is never a sense of how she developed into an artist, and this facet of her character is seen as peripheral to her sense of self. Atwood does hint at issues of gender and creativity, as when the narrator's former lover tells her there are no great women artists, but these aspects of the text are brief and marginal. The impression left is of a novel whose protagonist incidentally happens to be creative rather than a *Künstlerroman*.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, the case for excluding *Surfacing* from this project is quickly concluded. The absence of the three other texts, however, seems to demand more justification. *Lady Oracle* is the story of Joan Foster, who has enjoyed literary success twice over. Firstly, under the pen name 'Louisa K. Delacourt' she is a prolific writer of romantic fiction, and a commercial sensation. Later, and using her own name, she becomes a critically lauded poet and experimental novelist. The text is a comic narrative, a collage of literary styles and parodies, that 'asks its reader to interpret its main character within the context of fairy tale, Disney films, 'costume gothic romances' (of the Harlequin dime-store variety), and the tradition of Courtly Love'.<sup>94</sup> Unlike *Surfacing*, *Lady Oracle* incorporates a detailed exploration of Joan's childhood, and Atwood's portrayal of

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<sup>92</sup> Although even here, Atwood cannot be overlooked – while her fiction is not analysed, her literary criticism has proved far too useful to sideline.

<sup>93</sup> While I have reached a similar conclusion in regard to *A Bird in the House*, that text's relationship with *The Diviners* and its status as a 'draft-*Künstlerroman*' justify its inclusion in the study.

<sup>94</sup> Nathalie Cooke, *Margaret Atwood: A Critical Companion* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004) p22.

Joan would certainly 'tick every box' on Malmgren's list of *Künstlerroman* protagonist criteria: Joan's name(s) are all suggestively significant, her fluctuating physical appearance differentiates and defines her, and her family background is grotesquely dysfunctional. The narrative is driven by barbed observations about how women's writing is judged and evaluated in a patriarchal society, and the dark humour is frequently at the expense of the literary establishment – for example, the subversive edge to Joan being both a writer of 'trashy' romances and of radical, 'highbrow' poetry. And yet this novel still does not quite function as an authentic *Künstlerroman*. There is something altogether too convenient about Joan's writing career(s). She first begins to write romantic fiction to earn money. She writes her poetry after experimenting with spiritualism and automatic writing. There is no sense of literary apprenticeship or development, but rather an accidental quality to Joan's career – as there is indeed to her life in general. Ultimately, perhaps *Lady Oracle* is too concerned with comedy and pastiche to be helpfully considered alongside the more realist and psychologically credible texts of Montgomery, Munro and Laurence.

This charge of levity could certainly not be levelled at *Cat's Eye*, a deeply unsettling novel about the subjective truth of memory, and the damaging cruelty of children. The protagonist here is Elaine Risley, a painter, and the narrative circles around a retrospective exhibition of her work. Nathalie Cooke describes *Cat's Eye* as a novel that 'focuses on the nature and function of perspective in art: on the *eye* of the artist and the nature of the particular person or 'I' who narrates this novel'.<sup>95</sup> Compared to *Lady Oracle*, *Cat's Eye* provides an honest and credible account of what it means to be an artist. Through Elaine, Atwood can engage with debates about Canadian culture, feminism and art – as when Elaine reads a review of her own exhibition: 'I suck in some coffee, skip to the last paragraph: the inevitable *eclectic*, the obligatory *post-feminist*, a *however* and a *despite*. Good old Toronto bet-hedging and qualification. A blistering attack would be

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<sup>95</sup> Cooke, *Margaret Atwood*, p98. Italics in original.

preferable'.<sup>96</sup> The text itself then shares many qualities with the more realistic *Künstlerroman* narratives told by Montgomery, Munro and Laurence, and there is a sense of authenticity here that is missing from Atwood's previous *Künstlerroman*-type novels. And yet there is still a missing dimension. *Cat's Eye* is a very self-contained novel. It has a code of symbolism and anagogic metaphor within the text, but refuses to extend this beyond the boundaries of the narrative. Rather than communicating with other texts, the narrative is instead preoccupied with its own inner mechanics. In choosing to make her protagonist a visual rather than verbal artist, Atwood negates much of the genre's potential for metafictional significance. The descriptions of Elaine's paintings offer insight and clarity about the themes of the novel, but they cannot resonate beyond it. That is not to say the text does not have a literary consciousness – Atwood is too stylish a writer to neglect a trick – so for example, the most is made out of Cordelia's name and her Shakespearean pretensions. But ultimately, Elaine's paintings function as a screen to shield Atwood, and ensure she never reveals too much about the creative process.

Finally, Atwood's most recent potential *Künstlerroman* is *The Blind Assassin*, the 2000 Booker Prize winner. Self-consciously enigmatic, the novel juxtaposes three narrative strands, and alternates between the memoirs of the elderly Iris Griffen, and sections from a cult novel – *The Blind Assassin* – which we are told was written by Iris's younger sister Laura, and contains a 'novel within a novel' in the form of a science fiction fantasy. Unlike *Cat's Eye*, this is an inherently literary text, taking the emphasis away from the visual symbolism provided by Elaine's paintings and focusing on the intertextual complexity of the sisters' writing. The central relationship between Iris and Laura evokes a deliberately heavyweight litany of literary associations. It can be read as a return to *King Lear* – only this time without a Cordelia figure – implicating the Chase sisters as Goneril and Regan. The text is also loaded with mythical references. Cooke argues that the text

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<sup>96</sup> Atwood, *Cat's Eye*, p226. Italics in original.

offers a reworking of Sophocles' *Antigone*, with Laura as the self-sacrificing Antigone, and Iris as the more pragmatic sister, Ismene: 'the stuff of classic tragedy [...] told from a different point of view'.<sup>97</sup> The girls' tutor introduces them to the Latin classics, Ovid and Virgil, and takes a perverse pleasure in the more sadistic legends: 'he was fond of the suicide of Dido [...] or the parts where unpleasant things were done by the gods to various young women. The rape of Europa by a large white bull, of Leda by a swan, of Danae by a shower of gold.'<sup>98</sup> The myths seem to foreshadow the rape of Laura, by Iris's husband Richard – a man both physically and financially powerful – symbolised by the idea of the bull and the gold. Elsewhere in the text, the girls discuss Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* at length, with this passage offering an even more direct exploration of the novel's themes via another text. However, despite its multiple levels of narrative and intertextuality, *The Blind Assassin* still disengages itself from the deeper psychology of the *Künstlerroman*, in that the plot of secrecy and concealment vetoes the portrayal of creative development, and keeps the actual craft of writing off-stage: 'Laura was my left hand, and I was hers. We wrote the book together. It's a left-handed book. That's why one of us is always out of sight, whichever way you look at it.'<sup>99</sup> Yet again, Atwood chooses not to permit the reader to come too close to the writer's development. She detaches, distances and maintains a sense of separation in all of her portrayals of creative women; either through satire as in *Lady Oracle*, through an emphasis on visual symbolism rather than verbal talent as in *Cat's Eye*, or through writing around the writing rather than describing it, as in *The Blind Assassin*.

Finally, there is another, simpler reason for the decision to write this study without further reference to Atwood's fiction. Atwood is already the subject of literally hundreds of articles, books and theses, and the field is verging on saturation. Therefore,

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<sup>97</sup> Cooke, *Margaret Atwood*, p154.

<sup>98</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Blind Assassin* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000) p163.

<sup>99</sup> Atwood, *The Blind Assassin*, p513.

with so much already said about Atwood, and with her treatments of the *Künstlerroman* narrative lacking the elements of intimacy, creative development and intertextual communication that characterise the other texts considered, it seems simplest to have a discussion about Canadian women's writing that is, this one time, not overshadowed by Atwood, and remains focused on the more compatible, yet undeniably distinctive talents of Montgomery, Munro and Laurence.

### **The Thesis: Structure and Substance**

This thesis is primarily driven by questions of Canadian literary identity and female creativity, and will consider how they come to be combined. Through both conceptualising and critiquing the genre of the Canadian female *Künstlerroman*, I propose to establish its significance in mapping the dual construction of the authors' fictional characters and literary careers, and the metafictional writing into existence of three national writers.

The first chapter addresses issues of Canadian national identity, through an analysis of the landscape motif that persists through all the texts, and an analysis of how the Canadian locations operate in private and public spaces. Landscape is a theme that persists throughout the Canadian literary canon, from stereotypically wholesome nature poetry to the altogether darker presence of the wilderness: 'Not surprisingly in a country with such a high ratio of trees, lakes and rocks to people, images from Nature are almost everywhere [...] a Nature that is often dead and unanswering or actively hostile to man; or, seen in its gentler spring and summer aspects, unreal.'<sup>100</sup> The difficult relationship between national geography and national character that manifests itself so often as a theme in Canadian literature also has its roots in a second, equally ingrained cultural preoccupation. The history of Canada as an 'explored' and 'settled' country continues to

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<sup>100</sup> Atwood, *Survival*, p49.

have a considerable impact on Canadian culture, and is repeatedly reworked in literature. The themes of exploration and settling receive an ambivalent and wary treatment in Canadian fiction, and this chapter therefore focuses on the treatment of landscape and locations in conjunction with the portrayal of cultural heritage within the texts – not simply to establish that they *are* Canadian, but to ask *how* and *why* this is significant, and to locate the texts in terms of their relationships to those explicitly Canadian literary traditions. This chapter addresses these issues of geography and ancestry, but it is also concerned with how public and private spheres are understood and gendered. The protagonists' all struggle to find a sense of belonging, and interior spaces become just as significant as external vistas in appreciating the protagonists' search for a home. This is especially complicated for the writer-protagonists, as their personal and professional spaces are consolidated. Because they work from home, they are frequently expected to function as housewives rather than artists, and the ensuing tension is a source of some particularly revealing insights into how the authors' perceive the daily life of the woman writer. Lastly, as well as considering how the writers commentate on Canadian culture through the protagonists' own treatments of the landscape theme in fiction, the chapter reinforces the importance of these texts as being deliberately and strategically located as Canadian.

Chapter Two focuses on the protagonists' childhoods, and raises questions about the nature of talent and creative development that underline the complexities and conventions of the texts as *Künstlerroman* narratives. Traditionally, the *Künstlerroman* presents the artist as commanding an innate talent that separates them from their peers and establishes that 'the artist is a marked man' [sic].<sup>101</sup> This chapter therefore first explores how the authors interact with the literary heritage and tradition of the *Künstlerroman* in presenting their protagonists' family circumstances. Out of five

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<sup>101</sup>Malmgren, 'From Work to Text', p6.

protagonists, three are orphaned and one loses her father at a young age – only in *Lives of Girls and Women* do both parents survive the duration of the text. All five protagonists are, to differing degrees, isolated from their wider communities – whether from perceived superiority in the case of Emily, or all too visible poverty and deprivation in the case of Morag – and this too exerts a powerful impact upon their early development. This becomes particularly evident as the chapter moves on to a discussion of school and friendships, and the importance of socialisation and education in sparking the protagonists' creative abilities, as well as challenging their developing sense of self. It is at this point in the narratives I believe there is a crucial break away from certain narrative conventions previously identified as belonging to the *Künstlerroman*. Huf has asserted that the female artist is distinguished from an early age by a failure to relate to her own sex, in a reading already critiqued by Varsamopoulou, who notes that in Huf's understanding, female characters 'not only do not lend themselves as role models but also actively discourage artistic activity'.<sup>102</sup> Huf's reading taps into stereotypes of women as competitive, conventional and unsupportive, as well as reinforcing the myth of the woman artist's alienation from her gender. Instead, in the Canadian *Künstlerroman*, I repeatedly found this myth rejected. The protagonists tend to form peer group friendships, which, while never idealised or presented as perfect, are nevertheless crucial to their development. Furthermore, the texts all introduce the idea of mentor figures, who help guide and support the protagonists as they advance towards maturity. Vitally, these mentor figures are female, creating a network of support within the texts that echoes the intertextual dialogue of Canadian women's writing. Childhood is an essential component of the *Künstlerroman* narrative – the form demands that it be presented, in order to truly offer a demonstration of the artist's growth. In this chapter, I will outline the importance of how childhood is presented within the texts, and how the writers

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<sup>102</sup> Varsamopoulou, *The Poetics of the Künstlerinroman*, pxxii.

showcase struggles of identity that are particular to the protagonists' gender and nationality. Finally, in assessing the different theories of literary development that are explored, and the role played by mentor figures, this chapter will tap into debates of nature and nurture, and offer some potential answers to the driving question: *What makes a writer?*

Chapter Three continues the analysis of the texts as Canadian *Künstlerromans*, as the protagonists move away from childhood, towards the testing ground of adolescence, and the difficulties of negotiating adult relationships and careers. While the presentation of childhood must establish artistic potential, the presentation of their adult lives must establish what that potential ultimately amounts to. There is a crucial difference between the talented schoolgirl and the young woman who declares herself a writer, and the challenge is further complicated by the period of difficult transformation that marks their journey from the child to the adult worlds. Therefore this chapter begins with a consideration of adolescence and sexual awakening, which charts how the writers negotiate their protagonists' talent with their desire to 'fit in' and possess a more conventional type of attractiveness. As this stage of life culminates in decisions about the future, the next section explores how the protagonists embark on the first stages of their adult careers, and how frequently this is presented as a period of struggle and persistence in the face of social and/or financial hardship. In the female *Künstlerroman*, issues of marriage and family life are rarely presented as straightforward, and the chapter moves on to assess the protagonists' varied experiences of combining a career with romantic relationships. As Varsamopoulou has highlighted, male romantic interests in the female *Künstlerroman* tend to be far less understanding than their female counterparts: 'who, rather than being an inspiration or muse as women are in men's *Künstlerromane* [sic], are



downright unsupportive, and even obstacles when in love with the artist heroines’.<sup>103</sup> This section highlights the dilemmas and choices that are especially felt by the female artist, as she attempts to reconcile her intellectual and her emotional desires. It also considers the dilemma facing the authors – especially Montgomery – who must negotiate between narrative expectation and convincing characterisation. In light of Huf’s assertion that female *Künstlerroman* protagonists are faced with a choice between ‘procreativity and artistic creativity’<sup>104</sup> this chapter will also evaluate the presentation of motherhood in the texts, and assess the significance of there only being two out of five protagonists presented as mothers – each to an only daughter.<sup>105</sup> Finally, this chapter evaluates the success of these narratives as true *Künstlerroman* (a novel about an artist, not about someone who would have quite liked to have been an artist, or who tried to be an artist but gave up) by considering the actual achievements of the protagonists as their careers mature – their creative output, their different degrees of success, and their own attitude towards their careers. This is particularly important when considering the texts as meta-fictions, and in appreciating how they work as commentaries and criticisms on Canadian literature, and operate as devices through which the authors can promote their literary priorities and philosophies.

The last chapter explores the presence of Gothic elements in the texts, and in doing so reinforces the importance of the *Künstlerroman* as a narrative about writing as well as about a writer. If landscape is a founding theme in Canadian literature, then Gothic is a founding genre, and is so deeply embedded in the national literary psyche that it can be understood in terms of a haunting ghost or spectre: ‘This genre, which produces fear and pleasure, is particularly relevant for Canadian writing. Indeed, Canadian writers return again and again to the gothic to explore the positive and negative effects of

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<sup>103</sup> Varsamopoulou, *The Poetics of the Künstlerroman*, pxxii..

<sup>104</sup> Varsamopoulou, *The Poetics of the Künstlerroman*, pxxii.

<sup>105</sup> Vanessa in *A Bird in the House* makes a passing reference to having children at the close of the narrative, but Rose and Morag are the only protagonists to be presented as mothers in detail.

spectralization'.<sup>106</sup> There seems to be something inherent in the landscape, cultural and geographical, that lends itself to this genre, with its disturbing elements of mystery, horror, and repressed, confused sexuality. Of course, this is a genre that has a long and exceptionally productive association with women writers:

It [...] is a devious discourse full of secrets and silences and sublimations, and those very strategies of evasion have made it such a useful literary form for female writers for it allows for the expression of a range of feelings traditionally forbidden to women, while at the same time preserving the decorum of women's fiction.<sup>107</sup>

The Gothic's sense of drama and menace provides the woman writer with the perfect smokescreen, permitting her to explore themes of control, rebellion and sexual fantasy within an established narrative pattern. This sense of patterns is heightened by the intertextual dynamics of Gothic literature, as fictions reference and reinterpret their predecessors, and it is therefore essential to consider how the authors interact with and reinterpret Gothic conventions. This chapter charts how the authors conceptualise the Canadian Gothic through a two-fold process of subversion and regeneration, whereby they can both expose and exploit traditional conventions. It turns a spotlight onto the use of Gothic tropes and themes when presenting masculinity in the texts – for, while this is a study of women's writing and female protagonists, it is nevertheless through the portrayal of male sexual and social identity that the authors' Gothic talents are most acute. In conclusion, the chapter returns to the protagonists' careers, and assesses the influence of the Gothic on their literary sensibilities.

Finally, in a brief after-word to the thesis, I will consolidate the themes and questions that incepted it: how issues of gendered and national identities could combine,

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<sup>106</sup> Justin D. Edwards, *Gothic Canada: Reading the Spectre of a National Literature* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005) pxvi.

<sup>107</sup> Edwards, *Gothic Canada*, p74.

how writers could explore their own creativity, how texts could echo and support each other in establishing a narrative framework that addressed those same questions. As my thesis has taken the starting premise of an exploration rather than an argument, I cannot presume to offer answers; but I succinctly reassert the value and variety of the *Künstlerroman* in Canadian women's writing of the twentieth century.

# Chapter One

## *Canadian Landscapes and Locations:*

### *Public and Private Spaces in the Künstlerroman Narrative*

*Because there aren't any landscapes up there, not in the old, tidy European sense, with a gentle hill, a curving river, a cottage, a mountain in the background, a golden evening sky. Instead there's a tangle, a receding maze, in which you can become lost almost as soon as you step off the path. There are no backgrounds [...] no vistas; only a great deal of foreground that goes back and back, endlessly, involving you in its twists and turns of tree and branch and rock. No matter how far back in you go, there will be more. And the trees themselves are hardly trees; they are currents of energy, charged with violent colour.*

*~ Margaret Atwood*

## Introduction

While a national literature cannot be limited by its relationship to the national landscape, and a text can belong to a country without being located in it, it is no coincidence that all the texts considered in this study are primarily set in Canada and that the vast majority of the landscapes and locations described within them are explicitly Canadian. This chapter addresses issues of nation and nature through the tropes of landscape and location, and explores the intricate relationship between the portrayal of Canada, and the significance of the protagonists as Canadians, and specifically, as Canadian women. As Doreen Massey has noted, 'the intersections and mutual influences of 'geography' and 'gender' are deep and multifarious',<sup>108</sup> which in the context of this thesis stands as a timely reminder that the protagonists' gender and nationality are not just of equal significance, but are intricately blended in a complex balance, whereby both elements must be considered together in order to gain any degree of insight into the texts as Canadian female *Künstlerroman*. This process begins with a survey of the writers' own geographical connections to their homeland, which outlines both their fictionalised presentations of Canada, as well as how they themselves have been culturally and commercially incorporated into the national consciousness. The chapter then addresses the personal importance to the protagonists of Canada's cultural and political heritage within the texts, especially in terms of how their ancestry and their family backgrounds impact upon their sense of Canadian national identity. This is followed by a consideration of how the concept of 'home' is treated in the texts, as it is arguably here that the connection between gendered and national identities is most psychologically charged, as the focus shifts from the epic scope of the wilderness to the domestic intricacies of the private living space. Finally, this chapter focuses on the consequences of the Canadian locations when reading these texts as *Künstlerroman* and explores the protagonists' personal and

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<sup>108</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p177.

creative relationships with landscape and nature. For if, as Margaret Atwood has observed, 'landscapes in poems are often interior landscapes; they are maps of a state of mind'<sup>109</sup> then so too are the landscapes in *Künstlerromans* – and the state of mind they reflect is that of the developing artist.

It is worth pausing here to picture a literal map, and to remember that geographically, Canada is an intimidating prospect. The second largest country on Earth, it occupies roughly 9.984.670 km<sup>2</sup>, and accounts for 6.7% of the world's total surface. Canada's landscape includes coniferous forests, tundra, prairies and arctic barrens. It has more lakes than any other country, as well as one of the largest archipelagos of islands. Seasonally, temperatures might register anywhere between minus 15°C and plus 30°C. The vast scale and extremes of the landscape are contrasted with the lowest average population density in the world, with only 3.5 people per 1 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>110</sup> 'Not surprisingly,' as Atwood continues 'in a country with such a high ratio of trees, lakes and rocks to people, images from Nature are almost everywhere'.<sup>111</sup> Landscape is arguably the founding theme of Canadian literature, and remains a dominant concern.

Two of the earliest chroniclers of the Canadian landscape were, of course, Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill. Their respective responses to their new home reflect some of the many contradictions and complexities that appear in any attempt to describe the country. Moodie, who subscribed whole-heartedly to nineteenth-century notions about the sublime beauty of nature, was initially keen to convey the awe-inspiring aspect of her surroundings<sup>112</sup>: 'they [the mountains] loomed out like mighty giants – Titans of the earth, in all their rugged and awful beauty – a thrill of wonder and delight

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<sup>109</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1979) p49.

<sup>110</sup> For more information, see Robert M. Bone, *The Regional Geography of Canada* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>111</sup> Atwood, *Survival*, p49.

<sup>112</sup> For more on this, see Atwood, *Survival* p49-53.

pervaded my mind'.<sup>113</sup> Yet Moodie frequently grew miserable and frustrated with the hardships the early settlers encountered, and struggled to cope with the perishing winters, the swarms of summer insects, and the lack of creature comforts: 'Again and again we find her gazing at the sublime natural goings-on in the misty distance – sunsets, mountains, spectacular views – only to be brought up short by disagreeable things in her immediate foreground, such as bugs, swamps, tree roots and other immigrants.'<sup>114</sup> At points, W.J. Keith observes 'while reading Moodie we frequently receive painful glimpses of a mind at the end of its tether'.<sup>115</sup> While this may be true, Moodie's erratic company might well have been preferable to that of her relentlessly optimistic sister, who insisted that 'It has ever been my way to extract the sweet rather than the bitter in the cup of life'.<sup>116</sup> Avoiding Moodie's extremes of exhilaration and despair, Traill's work exhibits a cheerful ability to ignore both the sublime and the unbearable, and to focus instead upon the *pleasant*, as exhibited in her volumes of natural history *Canadian Wild Flowers* (1865) and *Studies of Plant Life in Canada* (1885).<sup>117</sup> Their early works were aimed primarily at women like themselves – Canada's early European settlers – and between them, Moodie and Traill compiled a culturally persistent version of Canadian landscape as both breathtaking and disturbing – as well as reminding readers that whatever their circumstances, the practical minutiae of daily life must be observed. Their 'factual' treatment of landscape and location laid the foundations for later generations of writers, especially other women, to develop these ideas in fiction, starting with their fictionalisation of Canadian geography to provide a setting for their narratives.

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<sup>113</sup> Susanna Moodie, *Roughing it in the Bush* (London: R. Bentley, 1857), p98.

<sup>114</sup> Atwood, *Survival*, p51.

<sup>115</sup> W.J. Keith, *Canadian Literature in English* (New York: Longman, 1985), p21.

<sup>116</sup> Catherine Parr Traill, 'Letter 18', W.J. Keith, *Canadian Literature in English* (New York, Longman, 1985), p19.

<sup>117</sup> For more on this, see p100-102.

## A Literary Map of Canada: The Geography of the Writers

L.M. Montgomery's name has become practically synonymous with that of her childhood home, Prince Edward Island, where she was born in 1874. Despite this strong association with Prince Edward Island, Montgomery attended Dalhousie University in Halifax and spent most of her married life from 1911 onwards living in Ontario. She died in Toronto in 1942. But, thanks to her fiction, she will be forever linked in literary and popular culture with Prince Edward Island – and while she wrote over thirty works of fiction, only *The Blue Castle* (1926) is set entirely away from Prince Edward Island. The impact of Montgomery's fiction on the perception of Canada (and in particular of Prince Edward Island) cannot be underestimated. As Irene Gammel observes; 'No other author has had Montgomery's sustained power to export Canadian literature and culture around the world. No other author has come to be associated so forcefully and emotionally with the nation's cultural heritage.'<sup>118</sup> The challenge when reading Montgomery is often to remember the difference between content and context, and to appreciate her work rather than her reputation within Canadian culture. It is all too easy to assume that one is on 'safe ground' with Montgomery, and to overlook her darker edges. This is especially relevant when considering the importance of landscape and location within her fiction; there is a lot more going on in her writing than the pastoral prettiness one might be lulled into expecting.

Montgomery's fiction primarily characterises Prince Edward Island as a rural idyll of spectacular natural beauty, whilst also retaining a sharp sense of how the Island's village communities operate within it, and their capacity for insularity and judgemental opinions. The opening of the *Emily* trilogy is classic Montgomery, delivering both the

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<sup>118</sup> Irene Gammel, 'Making Avonlea: An Introduction', Irene Gammel (Ed.) *Making Avonlea: L.M. Montgomery and Popular Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), p3 (pp3-17).



natural beauty and the social marginalisation that characterise her protagonist's young life:<sup>119</sup>

The house in the hollow was 'a mile away from anywhere' – so Maywood people said. It was situated in a grassy little dale, looking as if it had never been built like other houses, but had grown up there like a big brown mushroom [...] Ellen Greene said it was the loneliest [sic] place in the world and vowed she wouldn't stay there a day if it wasn't that she pitied the child.<sup>120</sup>

This description reveals the way in which, throughout the *Emily* trilogy, Montgomery celebrates, rather than sentimentalises, the landscape and locations of Prince Edward Island. Descriptions of the 'rosy sunset'<sup>121</sup> and the 'dear, friendly, little dormer window'<sup>122</sup> verge on the mawkish, but such observations tend to be credited more to the perspective of the young Emily rather than to the narrative voice and they are a habit out of which Emily grows. This avoidance of sentiment and cliché is not always apparent on Prince Edward Island itself. The island has a thriving Montgomery-tourism industry, including tours of 'Green Gables', costume parades, and an annual performance of *Anne of Green Gables: The Musical* that has been staged for over the past forty years. This has led to a plethora of accompanying memorabilia.<sup>123</sup> While Prince Edward Island is also a centre of academic study in Montgomery's work, and the University of Prince Edward Island has been home to the L.M. Montgomery Institute since 1993, the fact that Montgomery is one of the Island's major industries cannot be overlooked. Ultimately, when thinking about location and landscape in the *Emily* books, it is essential to maintain the distinction

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<sup>119</sup> Montgomery repeatedly locates her young female protagonists in beautiful but potentially isolated locations, as in *Pat of Silver Bush* (1933), *The Blue Castle* (1926) and *Anne's House of Dreams* (1917).

<sup>120</sup> L.M. Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon* (New York: Random House, 2003), p1.

<sup>121</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p52.

<sup>122</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p53.

<sup>123</sup> The shelves of the Charlottetown souvenir shops groan under the weight of 'L.M. Montgomery™' themed paraphernalia; from soaps to sweets to stationary. Whilst most of this merchandising features the ubiquitous Anne, ever since the *Emily* books were (very loosely) adapted for television by the CBC in 1998, there has been a marked rise in accessories to match.

between Montgomery's version of Prince Edward Island and the version that some elements of Prince Edward Island's tourist culture have constructed around Montgomery.

The locations used by Alice Munro in *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Lives of Girls and Women* have received a similar level of questionable biographical scrutiny, albeit on a much smaller and far less commercial scale. As with Montgomery, it is impossible to deny the element of autobiographical detail in her choice of settings. Readers who are familiar with the created communities of Jubilee (*Lives of Girls and Women*) and Hanratty (*Who Do You Think You Are?*) will probably not be surprised that Munro, who was born in 1931, grew up on the marginalized outskirts of rural Wingham, Ontario. While the sheer length of her impressive career has seen her adapt and update her representations of Canada, she has nevertheless been consistently fascinated by the post-World War II era of her own childhood, and as Stephen Regan has observed, both collections considered here are rooted in a Canada that is recognisably the one Munro grew up in:

The Canada she most frequently depicts is a country in transition, a Canada which has not entirely abandoned its Protestant ethics, nor completely accepted or even experienced the libertarian ideals of the 1960s. The impact of two world wars resonates throughout Munro's fiction, even in its most contemporary settings.<sup>124</sup>

Jubilee and Hanratty are both characterised as insular and isolated communities in rural Ontario. Munro's protagonists, Del and Rose, exist on the margins of these communities and share backgrounds of relative deprivation, which their later careers and academic successes will socially transcend. Rose is presented as being especially adept in utilising this: 'Rose knew a lot of people who wished they had been born poor, and hadn't been.

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<sup>124</sup> Stephen Regan, 'The Presence of the Past: Modernism and Postmodernism in Canadian Short Fiction', Coral Ann Howells & Lynette Hunter (Eds.) *Narrative Strategies in Canadian Fiction* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1991), p124 (pp108-133).

So she would queen it over them, offering various scandals and bits of squalor from her childhood'.<sup>125</sup> They are each members of a generation of women, perhaps the first generation, for whom such change is possible. As Del's proto-feminist mother observes in a much analysed statement, 'There is a change coming I think in the lives of girls and women'.<sup>126</sup> But while that change may be coming, the significance of Munro's locations is that Jubilee and Hanratty are the last outposts it will reach. They remain resolutely traditional and if an element of the *Künstlerroman* is that the artist must not merely develop, but that the development must be a struggle, then in Munro's fictions the struggle is grounded primarily in the nature of her chosen locations. Munro excels in describing the flat, uninspiring, and restrictive atmosphere of small-town life.:

They lived in the poor part of town. There was Hanratty and West Hanratty [...] In Hanratty the social structure ran from doctors and dentists and lawyers down to foundry workers and factory workers and draymen; in West Hanratty it ran from factory workers and foundry workers down to large improvident families of casual bootleggers and prostitutes and thieves.<sup>127</sup>

The first things that Del and Rose must overcome are their hometowns. The uncompromising and conventional solidity of these communities starkly underlines the aesthetic ethereality of Del and Rose's eventual careers, as observed by Coral Ann Howells: 'both are always aware of the fragility of these created worlds and the limits of their control'.<sup>128</sup> If artists are too frequently accused of not living in the 'real world', it is not an accusation that can be levelled at Del or Rose. They grow up in conditions that

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<sup>125</sup> Alice Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1978), p25.

<sup>126</sup> Alice Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women* (London: Penguin, 1971), p173.

<sup>127</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p5.

<sup>128</sup> Coral Ann Howells, *Private and Fictional Words: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s* (London: Methuen, 1987), p80.

make them acutely aware of a particularly restrictive brand of reality, and while their eventual careers may transcend it, this awareness underpins their understanding.<sup>129</sup>

This complex relationship between the author's presentation and the popular understanding of landscape and location in the Canadian *Künstlerroman* is also seen at work in the *Manawaka* cycle of Margaret Laurence. These five novels are interconnected by their setting, the fictional prairie town of Manawaka, which was to be billed by her publishers as the most famous fictional town in Canada.<sup>130</sup> Laurence grew up in the small rural town of Neepawa, Manitoba but travelled extensively and it seems worth briefly noting the role that *distance* played in her treatment of nation and identity: the majority of her writing on Africa was completed while she lived in Canada, and the majority of her fiction on Canada was completed whilst living in the UK. This perhaps provided her with the benefit of not only experiencing immersion in two different cultures, but also of offering a more detached perspective on her own, of which the *Manawaka* cycle was the result. Each novel in the *Manawaka* cycle offers a different account of female identity, and each identity is specifically dependent upon the rural Canadian location, leading the poet Liz Lochhead to observe that:

It is a source of her unique and enormous strength that she has this double, and dovetailing, task to do: to define and ultimately celebrate 'what it is to be human of the female kind' simultaneously with – I almost said *via* – an exploration both loving and merciless of her nation.<sup>131</sup>

But what is the significance of the decision to locate this 'loving and merciless' exploration in a fictional community? The device of setting successive novels in an imaginary, but realistic, location is, of course, not unique to Laurence's writing – perhaps

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<sup>129</sup> The section of *Lives and Girls and Women* which most explicitly addresses Del's choices about her future is tellingly entitled 'Real Life'.

<sup>130</sup> Montgomery's more devoted fans might challenge that and claim the title for Avonlea, but then again, the general consensus there seems to be to ignore that it is fictional at all.

<sup>131</sup> Liz Lochhead, 'Afterword', Margaret Laurence, *The Fire Dwellers* (London: Virago, 1969) p265. Italics in original.

the most classical example would be that of Thomas Hardy's Wessex. The cycle has also been compared to William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha in Mississippi or Sinclair Lewis's Gopher Prairie in Minnesota. Back on the Canadian side of the border the device has also been deployed, although less extensively, by Stephen Leacock, whose creation of Mariposa has been tellingly described as 'different from everywhere else, yet essentially the same'.<sup>132</sup> This observation goes some way towards revealing what might motivate the writer to deploy this type of setting, combining as it does the validity of realism along with the freedom of fiction.

Paradoxically, one of the primary effects this type of fictional setting has upon the reader is to create an impression of authenticity – an impression that is peculiarly unique to the setting being a small, rural town. When Laurence's characters leave Manawaka, it is to 'real' cities – Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto – rather than to fictional constructions. The difference in scale between the rural and the urban landscape makes this shift from 'imaginary' to 'real' not just acceptable, but essential. A fictional city would be redundant, in that it would damage, rather than reinforce that essential authenticity. Anyone even vaguely familiar with the geography of Canada would see through the device and the realism of the text would be shattered. However, it is the exact reverse that is true when considering the rural setting. Small towns do not easily lend themselves to the fictional manipulation permitted by cities. If a writer adds, for example, a café or two to Toronto, or an apartment block to Vancouver, what reader will really notice? In the anonymity of the city, anything is possible and a quick nod towards a major landmark usually provides enough authentication. A similar editing of an actual rural community is impossible, without shattering the realism of the text. To be 'different from everywhere else, yet essentially the same' requires something more subtle – the appearance of universality and the ability to engender recognition without compromising creative

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<sup>132</sup> Keith, *Canadian Literature in English*, p24.

control. It is one of the most striking features of the Manawaka series that it is repeatedly praised for its 'realism', perfectly illustrating the paradoxical nature of the fictitious setting mentioned above. Keith admires the 'familial and regional interconnexions [sic] between the stories that cumulatively reveal a unique sense of place',<sup>133</sup> while Clara Thomas, even before the series had reached *A Bird in the House* and *The Diviners*, was struck by the authenticity of Laurence's creation: 'Manawaka is fictionally real, with the hard surfaces and sharp outlines of a place in time and space, furnished with a density of sense-gratifying detail fitting to its place, its times and its seasons. Beyond that, it is timeless in its reference.'<sup>134</sup> Thomas's response provokes the image of Laurence redrafting the map of Canada, outlining the space Manawaka provides in geography, as well as in history and literature. After all, the sense of history, location and community that is essential to maintaining the fiction requires just such a new space and cannot be easily 'grafted on' to an existing locality. Any attempt to do so runs the risk of undermining the author's creative autonomy, making them vulnerable to accusations of plagiarism from life on the one hand and unrelentingly dogged biographical criticism on the other.<sup>135</sup>

Ultimately, the relationship that exists between autobiography, metafiction and the *Künstlerroman* narrative is complicated and unstable; the significance of each component shifts from context to context, and it becomes near impossible to untangle the different elements one from the other. This is especially apparent when considering the geography of the writers in this study, where the precise degree of overlap between the personal and the fictional shifts and slides. While the relationship between writer and

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<sup>133</sup> Keith, *Canadian Literature in English*, p159.

<sup>134</sup> Clara Thomas, *Margaret Laurence; Canadian Writers Number 3, New Canadian Library* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969), p57.

<sup>135</sup> For one of the worst offenders on this count, see Greta M.K. Coger 'Margaret Laurence's Manawaka: A Canadian Yoknapatawpha' Colin Nicholson (Ed.) *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Margaret Laurence* (London: Macmillan, 1990) p228-247. Having observed that both communities have a funeral parlour and are located near to a lake, Coger reaches the enlightening conclusion that everything and everyone in Manawaka has a Neepawa counterpart, and that by virtue of their race, the Tonnerres (presumably all of them) must be based on Neepawa resident 'Pat the Breed'.

work demands critical interrogation, this complexity must be appreciated and acknowledged, rather than cheapened by the direct substitution of one for the other. After all, the representations of Canadian locations are strategically and structurally complex, and their importance cannot be underestimated for the sake of autobiographical curiosity: in these narratives, landscape is more than just a background.

### **Family Trees and Family Ties**

The significance of landscape in the texts is psychological as well as geographical, and this is immediately apparent when considering the importance of the protagonists' family backgrounds. Their family trees and family ties are essential, not only as components in the process of characterising the protagonists, but also in understanding their Canadian identity. Family trees (their history beyond the timeframe of the text) explain the characters' heritage and ancestry, and represent their relationships to Canadian history and culture. Family ties (their bonds in the 'present' of the text) help to explore how and why they identify within their cultural communities. Together, these contribute towards the protagonists' understanding of themselves in both national and familial terms: to understand who they are, they have to understand where they have come from. These elements are emotionally invested in the presentation of landscape and location, and in how these themes together contribute towards the protagonists' developing identities.

For example, Emily's ambivalence about her move to New Moon finds a parallel in the feelings of her settler ancestors. Emily, orphaned and alone, must leave the familiarity of home for a new life among strangers. This is, of course, a narrative pattern that had already established Montgomery as a popular and successful author with the *Anne* books. There is a crucial inversion in the situations of Anne Shirley and Emily Byrd Starr: Anne, an exploited and neglected child who has never known her parents, is desperate to be adopted by the Cuthberts, whereas Emily, who has been loved and

understood by her father, is hurt and scared at the prospect of her new life with the Murrays. Montgomery's re-working of the orphan narrative has the potential for a wider significance, in that Anne and Emily's respective attitudes towards relocation echo the feelings of Canada's first settlers, torn between the desire to move and the temptation to stay put. This ambivalence is personified by two of Emily's great-great-grandmothers. The first, Mary, refused to leave Prince Edward Island, whilst the second, Elizabeth, refused to stay. Atwood has identified this dilemma as a central theme of Canadian literature, the idea of 'the reluctant immigrant': 'The characters don't think they are coming to a promised land; as a rule they come to get away from bad conditions somewhere else, but they are not travelling *towards* anything. No Statue of Liberty or Golden Doors await them.'<sup>136</sup> This dilemma mirrors that of Emily, but she quickly feels a connection with her new home that is based on her appreciation for its surrounding beauty: 'She breathed in the tang of fir-balsam and saw the shimmer of gossamers high up in the boughs'.<sup>137</sup> New Moon is steeped in tradition, and Emily establishes a place for herself within these traditions, until it is difficult to ascertain whether it is her bond with the land that connects her to her ancestry or her strong sense of her heritage that connects her to the land. One of Emily's proudest achievements in later life is to purchase a piece of adjoining land with money she earns from writing:

[I]t is mine – mine – mine. All the lovely things in it are mine – its moonlit vistas – the grace of its one big elm against the starlight – its June-bells and ferns – its crystalline spring – its wind music sweeter than an old Cremona. No one will ever cut it down or desecrate it in any way.<sup>138</sup>

Not only has she staked a claim to the land, but she has also asserted herself against one family tradition she cannot embrace – the laws of primogeniture that mean New Moon

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<sup>136</sup> Atwood, *Survival*, p151. Italics in original.

<sup>137</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p32.

<sup>138</sup> L.M. Montgomery, *Emily's Quest* (New York: Random House, 2003), p157.



itself must eventually pass to her cousin Andrew, and his determination to modernise will be allowed free rein. Emily may not be a settler in quite the same way as her ancestors, but she can still be a pioneer.

While Montgomery includes many detailed references to Emily's ancestors and extended family, Munro is unusual in presenting very little of her characters' family history, a tactic that reinforces their isolation. For example, it is striking that both Del and Rose are marginalised from their communities by the topography of their homes as well as the social status of their families. When Munro first introduces Del, she and her family live on the Flats Road, a remote stretch of land that is set away from the central community of Jubilee, and populated by farmers, bootleggers and idiots. Del notes that 'My mother corrected me when I said we lived on the Flats Road; she said we lived *at the end* of the Flats Road, as if that made all the difference'.<sup>139</sup> The distinction emphasises that while Del may grow up to feel like an outsider, her terminally unsatisfied and politically confused mother predates her in this sense of social incompatibility. Later in the collection, even after Del is living centrally in Jubilee, she cannot shake the stigma of her outside origins – as when a boy she likes jokes that he would walk her home 'If she didn't live such a long way out'.<sup>140</sup> In *Who Do You Think You Are?* the aforementioned separation of Hanratty and West Hanratty is reinforced by the physical barrier of the river that flows between them: 'Rose thought of her own family as straddling the river, belonging nowhere, but that was not true. West Hanratty was where the store was and they were, on the straggling tail end of the main street'.<sup>141</sup> Of course, rivers make for unreliable barriers – too fluid, too unpredictable (a theme that will be returned to later when considering Laurence's use of the river motif in *The Diviners*) and Rose is more accurate in her conviction that she 'belong[s] nowhere' than she yet understands. Later,

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<sup>139</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p7-8. Italics in original.

<sup>140</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p136.

<sup>141</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?* p5-6.

when Rose begins to educate herself away from her background – ‘she went across the bridge, she went to high school’<sup>142</sup> – the bridge clearly represents her progression as education is her means of ‘crossing over’. It is frequently a precarious crossing:

She was walking home across the bridge a few days later, and she heard someone calling. Not her name, but she knew it was meant for her, so she softened her steps on the boards, and listened. The voices were underneath her, it seemed, though she could look down through the cracks and see nothing but fast-running water.<sup>143</sup>

The suggestion of peril and instability in crossing highlights a central theme of all the texts in this study – that of ambivalence and doubt about relocation – whether social or geographical.

Settlers and relocation are also essential to understanding the way in which Laurence presents Canadian identity in *Manawaka*. Laurence frequently wrote of her fascination with the pioneer generation of Canadians, but it was a fascination built on aversion and fear as much as admiration: ‘In my experience, pioneers are pig headed old egoists who can’t relinquish the reins’.<sup>144</sup> Like Montgomery, Laurence examines the connections with Scottish history that will become so important in establishing Morag’s identity in *The Diviners*. Characters like Jason Currie in *The Stone Angel* epitomise the figure of the ‘founding father’ and act as cultural mediums (much like Mrs MacIntyre will be seen to do in *Emily Climbs*) who serve as a means of translation and deliver their nostalgic ideas of Scotland into the developing mythology of Canada. Jason’s daughter Hagar remembers how: ‘It seemed to me, from his tales, that Highlanders must be the most fortunate of all men on earth, spending their days in flailing about them with claymores,

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<sup>142</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p51.

<sup>143</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p136.

<sup>144</sup> Margaret Laurence, ‘Letter to Adele Wiseman 05/09/61’, Margaret Laurence, *The Stone Angel* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988) p132.

and their nights in eightsome reels. They lived in castles too, every man jack of them.’<sup>145</sup>

These nostalgic memories place the Canadian landscape in an interesting cultural position that seems reminiscent both of a sense of ‘promised land’ and yet also suggests that the hazily remembered ‘homeland’ remains superior. Again, we are presented with a deep sense of ambivalence towards Canada that is rooted in the feelings of the first European settlers. Laurence’s treatment of this cultural translation develops throughout the Manawaka cycle and portrays both how myths come into being, as well as what is lost in the process of translation. Throughout the Manawaka cycle, Scottish history takes on an increasingly nostalgic, mythic dimension that has precious little left to do with reality, and everything to do with how people build their identities. But while this is mainly a Scottish phenomenon, one of the most striking examples of ‘faking it’ culturally comes in *A Bird in the House*, with Vanessa’s Great Uncle Dan: ‘The way Uncle Dan talks isn’t Irish – it’s stage Irish. He’s got it all down pat. Macushla. Begorra. He even sings rebel songs, and he a Protestant’.<sup>146</sup> Dan represents both the freedom and the fallibility afforded in a ‘settler’ culture; the capacity for reinvention, and the uprooting of genuine connection with the past.<sup>147</sup>

This sense of history’s subjectivity in shaping national identity is especially explicit in a conversation between Nick and Rachel in *A Jest of God*. Rachel’s heritage is Scottish pioneer, and her family is emphatically middle-class. Nick however comes from a working-class background, with his family identified as Ukrainian immigrants. Early on in the text, Rachel observes how this translates into the Manawaka community: ‘Both came for the same reasons, because they had nothing better where they were before [...] The Ukrainians knew how to be the better grain farmers, but the Scots knew how to be

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<sup>145</sup> Laurence, *The Stone Angel*, p15.

<sup>146</sup> Margaret Laurence, *A Bird in the House* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985), p25.

<sup>147</sup> The fact that Dan cultivates an Irish rather than a Scottish identity seems tied to the stereotype of the bold and dramatic Irish poet-drunk, a persona with an obvious appeal.

almightier than anyone but God.’<sup>148</sup> Rachel’s sarcasm belies the all too real importance such distinctions hold within the community. Later, her conversation with Nick explores in more detail the problematic distinction between ‘pioneer’ and ‘immigrant’, and the impact this has not only on social status, but on personal identity in terms of being ‘Canadian’. Nick antagonises Rachel, while she resents his assumed superiority of suffering, even as her liberal guilt complex is stung into apology: ‘I forget, and feel apologetic towards people like your family, that they went through all that. But so did mine – only it was longer ago’.<sup>149</sup> Laurence acknowledges both the truth and the futility of Rachel’s response: it is quite possibly true that the only difference between ‘pioneers’ and ‘immigrants’ are the years separating their arrival, but it is equally true that this has no bearing upon social attitudes and class structures, which remain rigidly divisive.

Furthermore, Laurence acknowledges that there exists a social group excluded from both these narratives, and in her consideration of Canada’s First Nation peoples, exposes the disturbing foundations upon which ‘settled’ countries are built.<sup>150</sup> Laurence is unable to ignore that when the pioneering generation ‘carved [settlements] out of the wilderness’,<sup>151</sup> this was at the expense of the existing population, and throughout the Manawaka cycle she grows increasingly concerned with narrating the Métis experience alongside that of the European. In her essay ‘Man of our People’, Laurence describes herself as ‘long concerned and troubled by’ the history of the Métis peoples, and charts her desire to make this history part of Canada’s ‘official’ narrative, via her fascination with figures such as nineteenth-century Métis military leader Gabriel Dumont: ‘There are many ways in which those of us who are not Indian or Métis have not yet earned the right to call Gabriel Dumont ancestor. But I do so, all the same. His life, his legend, and

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<sup>148</sup> Margaret Laurence, *A Jest of God* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988), p71.

<sup>149</sup> Laurence, *A Jest of God*, p112.

<sup>150</sup> For more information, see Olivia Patricia Dickason, *Canada’s First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>151</sup> David Lucking, *Ancestors and Gods: Margaret Laurence and the Dialectics of Identity* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), p155.

his times are a part of our past which we desperately need to understand and pay heed to.’<sup>152</sup> In explicitly establishing her interest in Métis history, and her objective in attacking oppositional designations – ‘us’ and ‘them’ – Laurence does more than just add an extra narrative strand to the Manawaka cycle for a heightened sense of verisimilitude. Instead, she exposes the limitations of Canadian ‘grand narratives’ that negate the Métis experience and moves towards a more collective sense of cultural history.

In so firmly establishing their protagonists’ relationships to Canadian history through the medium of their family backgrounds, the writers all stress the connection between the personal and the political that is imperative when it comes to such a subjective and emotionally-charged idea as national identity. They ally their protagonists within established traditions and cultural mythologies, but also grant them the ability to perceive that such mythologies are constructs, and that there is invariably another side to the story. Moreover, in highlighting the central ambivalence towards identity and belonging that seems to repeatedly underline any discussion of Canadian heritage, these narratives all draw connections between cultural and creative identities, suggesting that for their *Künstlerroman* protagonists, Munro’s driving question of ‘Who do you think you are?’ will never be easy to answer.

### Home Sweet Home?

A further challenge to all of the protagonists considered in this study is to find a sense of home – to locate themselves both culturally and practically – in the fraught political and social circumstances of their respective Canadian landscapes. This challenge is an essential part of the *Künstlerroman* narrative in that it dramatises the protagonist’s search for the autonomous identity that will enable their creativity. They must both come to terms with and carve out for themselves a sense of home, reconciling their heritage with

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<sup>152</sup> Margaret Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1980), p236.

their present-day circumstances. This search carries the additional significance of combining fundamental questions about gender and location, with the concept of 'home' at the crux of an emotionally charged debate. Massey has noted that 'the construction of 'home' as a woman's place has, moreover, carried through into those views of the place itself as a source of stability, reliability and authenticity',<sup>153</sup> and supports this by reference to the idealised portrayals of home by male authors (e.g. the tendency of the 'angry young men' in 1950s British drama to contrast the honesty and warmth of working class communities in the North of England with the superficiality of the middle class urban South). Clearly then, there are inevitable repercussions when a female artist challenges the prescribed notion that her place is in the home. Not only does this undermine the 'stability, reliability and authenticity' of the construct, but it also calls into question the assumptions which created it. In asserting her desire for a career beyond the domestic space, the female *Künstlerroman* protagonist embarks on the difficult process of renegotiating the very nature of home itself.

For Emily, this journey is symbolised by and crystallised around a series of actual buildings and locations. She has an intense bond with her first house, the home she shares with her father, and is distraught at having to leave it behind. Still, she responds instantly to the charms of New Moon and is surprisingly successful at integrating herself into its everyday life. For such a precocious and artistic child, she is also a practical one, and becomes helpful around the house and farmyard. In *Anne of Green Gables* Montgomery made much comedy of her heroine's misguided efforts to be helpful – baking an inedible cake for the vicar, accidentally intoxicating her friend when hosting a tea party – but Emily is spared such domestic mishaps. She successfully bakes for unexpected guests, and even manages to go undetected in carrying out the forbidden chore of skimming the milk. These contrasts highlight the change in tone between the

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<sup>153</sup> Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, p180.

*Anne* and the *Emily* books and emphasise that the latter is an essentially serious characterisation, and the tone of the books is much darker overall. Perhaps an even more telling difference is the way in which, even at this early stage in her life, Emily is aligned with her individual home rather than any wider sense of community, establishing a pattern that will be repeated and developed later in the narrative. While the titles of the *Anne* books show Anne gradually extending her sense, both of belonging and of ownership, from Green Gables to the town of Avonlea to the Island itself, Emily does not undergo a similar process. She is able to transfer her loyalties from 'the house in the hollow' to New Moon, but that is as far as we see her go. Emily remains 'of' New Moon, and this is a bond that will have serious consequences for her future career path.<sup>154</sup>

Perhaps the earliest manifestation of what Kate Lawson calls 'the void or lack [...] that resides within the familiar'<sup>155</sup> comes when Aunt Elizabeth punishes Emily by locking her up in the spare room. Even though Emily feels safe at New Moon, it still contains the capacity to terrify her. The episode is usually read in terms of its intertextual links to *Jane Eyre*, and the parallels are indeed numerous.<sup>156</sup> Despite the precedent set by Jane, who collapses in fear, Emily finds that she has the strength and resourcefulness to open the window, and escape via a convenient ladder. Elizabeth Epperly perceives this difference in terms of personality, suggesting Emily's individuality provokes her into action: 'the aftermath of Emily's terror, though radically different to Jane's, is appropriate to Emily's individualism within the culture surrounding her'.<sup>157</sup> Yet I think it is worth considering Emily as *part* of her culture in her actions; in her escape there is once more the echo of the settler theme, the need for escape and risk-taking, and the retreat from

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<sup>154</sup> For more on this, see p149 and p231-232.

<sup>155</sup> Kate Lawson, 'The "disappointed" house: Trance, loss and the uncanny in L.M. Montgomery's *Emily* Trilogy', *Children's Literature: Annual of the Modern Language Association Division on Children's Literature* (2001) p75 (pp71-90).

<sup>156</sup> For more on this, see p231-232.

<sup>157</sup> Elizabeth Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass: L.M. Montgomery's Heroines and the Pursuit of Romance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p29.

the 'civilization' of the house into the 'wilderness' of Lofty John's bush. In her victorious getaway, Emily is, fleetingly, a pioneer herself.

Away from New Moon, Emily frequently forms attachments to empty houses. Lawson has convincingly argued that Emily is unable to disassociate the twin traumas of losing her father and losing her childhood home, and that this later manifests itself in Emily's fascination with homes: 'Although each empty house allows Emily to imagine the potential homelike space it might become, it also acts as an uncanny mirror reflecting back to Emily the potential void or lack, the unhomely, that resides within the familiar'.<sup>158</sup> Emily can be thus seen as torn between her need for home and her subconscious conviction that 'home' is not something to be relied upon. In *Emily Climbs*, such a house is at the centre of one of her 'psychic episodes', when she is so deeply struck by its appearance that she claims it as her own: 'Of course, I don't *own* it. But haven't you sometimes seen houses that you knew belonged to you no matter who owned them?'.<sup>159</sup> Later, Emily and Ilse spend the night with a family who are desperately searching for their missing child. When Emily sleeps, she draws a sketch of where the boy can be found, but has no recollection of doing this in the morning.<sup>160</sup> The sketch shows the house that Emily connected with the day before. As much as she is delighted at the child's rescue, she is also confused and uncomfortable – both at the manifestation of her uncanny powers and at the role the house has played in this vision. As Lawson observes: 'That the home with which Emily feels a psychic bond is not only believed to be empty but actually contains a prisoner desperate to escape suggests that Emily's own dreams of fulfilment and home may be in some sense contaminated at their source.'<sup>161</sup> Later, in an episode that has more social than psychic consequences, Emily and her friends shelter from a storm in the deserted 'Old John House'. The night itself gives Emily immense

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<sup>158</sup> Lawson, 'The "disappointed" house', "p72.

<sup>159</sup> L.M. Montgomery, *Emily Climbs* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p181. Italics in original.

<sup>160</sup> For more on this, see p245-246.

<sup>161</sup> Lawson, 'The "disappointed" house', p80.



pleasure: 'It was very pleasant [...] to think about the vanished life of this old dead house, in the years when it had been full of love and laughter'.<sup>162</sup> The house is also the setting for a personal revelation, as Emily realises the extent of her developing feelings for Teddy: 'She had always known that she liked Teddy better than any other male creature in her ken – but *this* was something apart from liking altogether – this sense of belonging to him that had come in that significant exchange of glances.'<sup>163</sup> Unfortunately, the episode is salaciously misinterpreted by the local community, exposing Emily and Ilse to 'venomous innuendo'<sup>164</sup> and social disgrace. The more resilient Ilse is impervious to gossip, but the sensitive Emily is mortified. Although the unexpected intervention of her Aunt Ruth restores Emily's reputation, her trust in Ilse is compromised by Ilse's inability to keep a secret: 'Ilse told it in school and described her drunken orgy with great spirit and vivacity'.<sup>165</sup> Perhaps it is not going too far to make a connection between another empty house, and another 'void or lack, [...] that resides within the familiar'<sup>166</sup> – in this case, the lack of understanding that resides at the heart of Emily and Ilse's friendship, however close and familiar they might be to each other – a lack which has serious repercussions for their friendship in adult life.<sup>167</sup>

Of course the most significant of Emily's empty houses is the 'Disappointed House', built by a distant cousin for his bride, and abandoned when she jilted him. In childhood, it fascinates her, becoming a playhouse, a hideout, and a symbol of her aspirations towards future domesticity, as when she and Teddy make a rather too consciously naïve pact that 'when we grow up we would buy the Disappointed House and live here together'.<sup>168</sup> Later, when she becomes engaged to Dean Priest, he purchases

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<sup>162</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p269.

<sup>163</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p269. Italics in original

<sup>164</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p276.

<sup>165</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p273.

<sup>166</sup> Lawson, 'The "disappointed" house', p74.

<sup>167</sup> For more on this, see p129-130 and p195-196.

<sup>168</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p288.

the house for when *they* are married. As will be explained in Chapter Three, Emily's engagement to Dean comes when she is at a personal nadir, caused more than partly by Dean's manipulation.<sup>169</sup> She submits herself completely to him and abandons her writing career. The catalogue of literary reference that has characterised Emily's narrative is replaced with a domestic itinerary, as the couple furnish and decorate their house. It becomes clear that not only does the Disappointed House carry personal and emotional significance for Emily, but it is also a crucial textual symbol of her state of mind, with a newly imposed layer of superficial domesticity that masks an underlying sadness.

When Dean buys the house, Emily throws herself into its renovation, embarking on a mission to create the perfect home. Lawson reads this as a classic case of nest-building: 'Emily's joy lies in imagining a recovery of the place of disappointment and loss, of seeing the uncannily familiar but empty space of the house transformed into a homelike and loving place'.<sup>170</sup> I would posit also that what Emily is truly trying to recover is her independent identity, not as Dean Priest's fiancée, but the writer, Emily Byrd Starr. Her obsessive furnishing appears as a desperate attempt to fill in the gap left by her abandoned career. But despite functioning as a symbol of Emily's denial, the house is also the site of her release: it is here she has the vision which leads her to break the engagement.<sup>171</sup> Ultimately, the house is jilted for a second time, boarded up and abandoned, becoming a reproachful symbol to Emily of all that she has sacrificed. It makes its final appearance in the concluding paragraph of the trilogy, when Dean signs over the deeds as a wedding present to Emily and Teddy. This inclusion adds a final note of discord to an already ambiguous ending; apart from anything else this is a house that has twice been left vacant due to broken engagements. There is something both presumptuous and overbearingly patriarchal in Dean's accompanying letter, in which he

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<sup>169</sup> For more on this, see p191-193.

<sup>170</sup> Lawson, 'The "disappointed" house', p79.

<sup>171</sup> For more on this, see p246-247.

asserts his visitation rights upon the happy couple: 'I claim my old corner in your house of friendship now and then'.<sup>172</sup> Emily's reaction is at best inadequate, at worst wilfully ignorant of Dean's character, when she responds 'How very – dear – of Dean. And I am so glad – he is not hurt any longer'.<sup>173</sup> Lawson describes Emily at the end of the trilogy with 'the deed to the "Disappointed" house in her hand, waiting for Teddy to join her, an apt image of happy expectation and coming fulfilment that already "owns" the moment of loss and disappointment'.<sup>174</sup> It is a reading that encapsulates the contradiction but refuses to speculate as to how it may be resolved – a duality that becomes increasingly important in reading Emily's adult relationships and career.<sup>175</sup>

In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Del's childhood is divided between the Flats Road and central Jubilee. She is aware from a young age of not fitting into either community, disguising her isolation with ambitions of success that are an uneasy mixture of vulnerability and bravado: 'it was glory I was after, walking the streets of Jubilee like an exile or a spy, not sure from which direction fame would strike, or when, only convinced from my bones out that it had to'.<sup>176</sup> Within the text, it is Del's suspicion that she is 'an exile or a spy' that affects her life more than her hopes of future fame and glory. Her life becomes divided between her mother's domain in Jubilee and her father's farm on the Flats Road, where he and her brother Owen share a connected kinship that excludes and differentiates Del: 'they were happy as they were, my father and Owen [...] My father treated me politely, he praised my house cleaning, but he never joked with me as he would with girls who lived on the Flats Road'.<sup>177</sup> Del's living arrangements make this sense of familial alienation physically real and signal her increasing sense of not fitting comfortably into either setting.

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<sup>172</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p228.

<sup>173</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p228.

<sup>174</sup> Lawson, 'The "disappointed" house', p86.

<sup>175</sup> For more on this, see p196-197.

<sup>176</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p141.

<sup>177</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p226-227.

Atwood has said that 'If in England the family is a mansion you live in, and if in America it's a skin you shed, then in Canada it's a trap in which you're caught'.<sup>178</sup> If we expand her use of the term 'family' to include home and community, then it is a statement that is demonstrated throughout *Lives of Girls and Women* with a comic literality. Del's feelings of entrapment are repeatedly made bodily manifest. When she agrees to strip for the edification of Jerry Storey (the awkward, academic boy who has been socially assigned to her as a potential boyfriend by virtue of their shared intelligence) they are interrupted by his mother's unexpected return home. The episode descends into farce, and Del descends into the cellar: 'I was all by myself on the back cellar stairs, locked in, naked [...] Once I got used to the dark perhaps I could find the cellar windows and try to force one of them open, but what good was that going to do me, when I was naked?'<sup>179</sup> Eventually, Jerry drops her clothes down the laundry chute, and Del is able to make her getaway. Of course, it is not the only time that she is forced to such an escape; when she and her friend Naomi go back to a hotel with two men after a dance, Del makes a similarly clumsy break for freedom and slips down the fire escape after excusing herself to use the bathroom. These episodes, so reminiscent of Emily's flight from the spare room at New Moon, associate closed spaces with closed options: Del has more freedom outside. Perhaps there is more than logistic convenience to the fact that when Del eventually chooses to have sex, it is in the garden rather than the bedroom, and the majority of her relationship with Garnet is conducted *al fresco*. Although the retrospective voice of the 'adult' Del that informs the epilogue of *Lives of Girls and Women* expresses a nostalgic yearning for the past and a ruefully surprised acknowledgement that she has become 'greedy for Jubilee',<sup>180</sup> one cannot help suspecting that this does not equate to actually returning there; presumably Del has put her practice at bolting to good use.

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<sup>178</sup> Atwood, *Survival*, p131.

<sup>179</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p202.

<sup>180</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p249.

However, it is worth stressing that within the text, Del is not of an age to really exercise her autonomy and escape. It is then especially striking that the imagery of entrapment and alienation is developed in *Who Do You Think You Are?*, testifying that this is more than adolescent angst as Rose struggles with these same issues throughout her adult life. Rose is an essentially nomadic character, who seems unable to disassociate settling down from stagnation and feels marginalised from the majority of the spaces she occupies. As a student, she is uncomfortable boarding with the middle-class Dr. Henshawe and feels awkward amongst the rituals of the academic's genteel life: 'she felt discouraged, sitting in the dining room with a linen napkin on her knee'.<sup>181</sup> Still, the experience of living there is enough to make her equally uncomfortable at home: 'Dr. Henshawe's house had done one thing. It had destroyed the naturalness, the taken-for-granted background, of home. To go back there was to go quite literally into a crude light'.<sup>182</sup> Rose appears increasingly out of her depth; self-conscious about her working-class background, she has not yet learned how to use it for her own advantage, and struggles to decide where she belongs.

During her marriage to the wealthy Patrick Blatchford, Rose acquiesces to his tastes and standards, surprising herself when she confesses to a friend that she resents his choice of house:

'We just spent all our money on a house Patrick wanted.'

'Didn't you want it?'

'Not so much as he did.'

That was something Rose had never said before.<sup>183</sup>

The house itself is Patrick's domain. He is fastidious about its appearance and enjoys showing it off to their guests while Rose cringes on the sidelines: 'she stayed in the

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<sup>181</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p89.

<sup>182</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p90.

<sup>183</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p137.

kitchen, but she could still hear Patrick's voice and she knew beforehand everything he would say'.<sup>184</sup> Patrick's taste in interior design is easy to mock – Rose's friend Jocelyn calls their home 'The department store heir's dream of elegance'<sup>185</sup> – but he at least is comfortable with his environment. Even after they have separated, Rose still seems unable to create a real home for herself and in fact sets out to avoid one: 'She would not care, she would not bother making a setting for herself, she disliked all that'.<sup>186</sup> Of course, the crucial word in that sentence is *setting*. Rose the actress is astute to the deceptive nature of designed spaces, yet at the same time she succumbs, ending up with an apartment 'which belonged quite recognisably to a woman, living alone, probably no longer young, who was connected, or hoped to be connected, with a college or the arts'.<sup>187</sup> Rose's profession then becomes crucial to understanding her relationship with the concept of 'home'. She is suspicious of 'setting', aware that it is an illusion that can be quickly created from a props cupboard. But she is also fascinated by it, and at times actively enjoys the process of creation. Later still, when she is living out in the country, she takes the most pleasure in the location when she can use it as the setting for a new relationship. Her rural house provides the perfect backdrop for the performance of her affair with Simon: 'I was thinking we might plant the garden next weekend. I have bought a great array of seeds (a lie, but she would buy them, if she heard from him)'.<sup>188</sup> Simon is her audience as well as her lover, and the reflection he provides of her in the setting of this house seems more satisfying to her than the house itself. Significantly, when the relationship is terminated and Rose imagines him meeting a new woman, she

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<sup>184</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p155.

<sup>185</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p154.

<sup>186</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p182.

<sup>187</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p182.

<sup>188</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p225.

articulates this fear through the image of new locations, imagining Simon led 'through a doorway into a room or landscape where Rose couldn't follow'.<sup>189</sup>

This restless, migratory quality to Rose's character, as well as her chosen career path, both stem from her feelings about Hanratty. She is frequently presented as incorporating monologues and set-pieces about Hanratty into her public persona, having learnt to exploit her past to her advantage in the present and to shock and amuse her friends with schoolyard anecdotes or letters from her step-mother: 'She read it for comic effect, and dramatic effect, to show the gulf that lay behind her'.<sup>190</sup> With this in mind, it is telling then that Rose's version of reconciliation with Hanratty comes neither from physical return or performative exorcism. Instead, she appears to find a sense of peace with her hometown through a private memory – in keeping her final meeting with Ralph Gillespie and her knowledge of his death a secret, Rose possesses a snapshot of Hanratty that 'she wouldn't spoil by telling'.<sup>191</sup> Her confidential attitude to this memory, as opposed to her usual public displays, allows her to keep something of Hanratty exclusively to herself and with this sense of private ownership, her control over her past appears at least somewhat restored.

Vanessa's relationship with Manawaka is similarly ambivalent. As with Del, the first person narrative negotiates between two distinct timeframes – the events of the text and the adult perspective that comes from 'outside' of it – and never provides details of the journey from one into the other. In the concluding pages of *A Bird in the House*, Vanessa briefly returns to Manawaka, some twenty years after leaving, and with her feelings about the town still unresolved: 'I went alone. It would have no meaning for anyone else. I was not even sure it would have any meaning for me. But I went'.<sup>192</sup> Vanessa's ambivalence can be traced back to the events of her childhood that are

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<sup>189</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p228.

<sup>190</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p249.

<sup>191</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p276.

<sup>192</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p178.

portrayed and in particular, the lack of a stable, permanent family home. As with the *Emily* trilogy, houses function as crucial tropes for concerns about family and social identity, and in *A Bird in the House*, Laurence uses the two houses Vanessa inhabits to equal effect. At some point before the timeframe of the narrative, Vanessa and her parents have lived in their own home, but the Depression forces them to live with relatives. Firstly, they move to the MacLeod House, with Ewen's widowed mother. Grandmother MacLeod is at once archaic and formidable. She is deeply attached to a bygone era, yet still capable of exerting herself in the present one. She considers herself fallen on hard times, but sustains herself with her unflinching sense of respectability and an obstinate adherence to her obsolete standards. The house itself seems to echo her nineteenth-century sensibilities: 'Its dark red brick was grown over at the front with Virginia creeper [...] It boasted a small tower in which Grandmother MacLeod kept a weedy selection of anaemic ferns'.<sup>193</sup> Vanessa finds the atmosphere oppressive – there are endless 'rooms where my presence, if not actually forbidden, was not encouraged'<sup>194</sup> – and she is further stifled by her mother's constant anxiety that she will damage the furniture or break the ornaments: 'The living room was another alien territory where I had to tread warily, for many valuable objects sat just-so on tables and mantelpiece and dirt must not be tracked in [...] My mother was always nervous when I was in this room.'<sup>195</sup> Later, after their father dies, Vanessa's mother moves the children back to *her* family home – the Brick House – and it is this house that dominates the text, and dominates Vanessa's early life, without ever providing a sense of home:

The house in Manawaka is the one which, more than any other, I carry with me. Known to the rest of the town as "the old Connor place" and to the family as the Brick House, it was plain as the winter turnips in the root cellar,

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<sup>193</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p35.

<sup>194</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p35.

<sup>195</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p36.



sparsely windowed as some crusaders embattled fortress in a heathen wilderness, its rooms in a perpetual gloom.<sup>196</sup>

The Brick House's solid austerity reflects that of its creator, Vanessa's grandfather, the archetypal pioneer patriarch. The inter-generational tension between Grandfather Connor and his descendents becomes a major theme of *A Bird in the House*, making it an exceptionally uncomfortable place to inhabit. Neither Vanessa nor her mother are permitted to 'make themselves at home' – forbidden to unpack the MacLeod china, unable to make visitors welcome – the house becomes a lifeless 'monument'<sup>197</sup> that Vanessa is 'frantic to get away'<sup>198</sup> from. Once more, Atwood's image of the family as trap is painfully apt, as Vanessa's domestic landscape proves increasingly harsh and restrictive.

With the exception of Emily, who quickly grows to love and value New Moon, all the protagonists here can be read as negotiating their way through a similar process in relation to their hometowns.<sup>199</sup> Primarily, there is the urge to escape, and later, there comes to need to accept and/or reconnect with the place they grew up in. Del retrospectively appreciates the value of Jubilee, Vanessa moves towards closure rather than connection with Manawaka, and Rose retains one snapshot of life in Hanratty that is important enough to keep private. This process is also at work in Laurence's *The Diviners* – but on a far more epic scale than any previously encountered. In *The Diviners*, Laurence portrays the search for home and identity via Morag's pilgrimage to what she believes is her ancestral home: Scotland. As a child, Morag is fascinated by Christie's tales of Piper Gunn, a mythological Scotsman who led the clans to Canada, and when she needs to find that same sense of home and history in her adult life, she looks to Scotland to provide it.

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<sup>196</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p1.

<sup>197</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p1.

<sup>198</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p174.

<sup>199</sup> This differentiation is perhaps best explained by remembering the gap between Montgomery's 'target audience' and that of Munro and Laurence.

Morag is presented as hesitant about actually crossing the border. She is restless and dissatisfied in Canada, seizing on the move to the United Kingdom as somehow predestined: 'I've known for a long time I had to go there'.<sup>200</sup> But once across the Atlantic, her nerve fails her and she settles in London. The hesitancy is striking – Morag admits it frequently during her time in London – but she struggles to overcome it. She is aided and abetted in this by her lover, Dan McRaith. A married artist and father of seven, the brooding Dan offers a way for Morag to indulge in her romance with Scotland, whilst keeping it at a distance. She delights in his Gaelic nickname for her, 'Morag Dhu' (translated as 'black Morag', which he uses in reference to her hair, and she in reference to her temper), but neither of them actually has enough command of the language to spell it. Laurence uses the name elsewhere: 'Roderick Dhu' was the nickname Grandmother MacLeod bestowed on her younger son in *A Bird in the House*, a naming that is recalled with sarcastic anger by her other son Ewen; 'As though he were a character out of Sir Walter Scott, instead of an ordinary kid'.<sup>201</sup> The repeated use of the Gaelic in these situations reinforces the theme of Scottish heritage that forms a backbone to the Manawaka cycle, and also reveals the danger in romanticising that heritage. When Morag finally makes her journey to Scotland, it is a trip that brings self-realisation, but through a process of disillusionment rather than recognition. Morag is at last disabused of two false notions that have tied her to the United Kingdom. Firstly, she realises that Dan, who professes to admire her independent character, will never leave his dependent wife. Secondly, but far more importantly, she realises she cannot find a sense of home in Scotland:

'It's a deep land here, all right,' Morag says, 'But it's not mine, except a long long way back. I always thought it was the land of my ancestors, but it is not.'

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<sup>200</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p547.

<sup>201</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p46.

‘What is then?’

‘Christie’s real country. Where I was born.’<sup>202</sup>

Morag and Pique return to Canada in time for Morag to be at Christie’s deathbed and to acknowledge he has been her father in every meaningful sense of the word. They eventually settle on the farm at McConnell’s Landing, and Morag wryly acknowledges the irony of where her quest for a sense of belonging has led her: ‘Morag Gunn, fleeing Manawaka, finally settling near McConnell’s Landing, an equally small town with many of the same characteristics’.<sup>203</sup> The cyclical nature of *The Diviners* is established on another crucial level as Morag resigns herself to her home and to her Manawaka heritage.

For all the protagonists then, home is a concept that can never be taken for granted. Their natures and ambitions make it difficult for them to accept the domestic place they are allocated, as their artistic identities challenge the tradition of gendering the home space as conventionally female. For the writer-protagonists, especially Emily and Morag, their home is also their workplace. A turning-point in Emily’s development as a writer comes when she is given a ‘room of her own’, where she can keep her own schedule and write undisturbed. Meanwhile, Morag must defend her workspace from outside interruption, highlighting the practical problems inherent in combining public and private spaces. After all, the concept of home is a practical concern, as evinced by the attention paid in all the narratives to the protagonist’s physical environment. It is also frequently a financial issue, as when Rose admits the cost of her home with Patrick, or when Vanessa’s family must move in with relatives during the Depression. Underpinning these pragmatic concerns there is always the psychological journey, the search for a place that *feels* as well as looks like home, and whether their journey is initially one of connection or escape, they must come to accept ‘home’ on their own terms.

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<sup>202</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p390-391.

<sup>203</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p354.

## Landscape in the Protagonists' Characters and Careers

The factors discussed so far – the geography of the writers and their chosen locations, the protagonists' family trees, and their struggles to find a sense of home – are all brought into focus together when assessing how the themes of landscape and location impact on reading the texts as Canadian *Künstlerromans*. The presentation of the characters' personal relationships with landscape and nature and the presentation of how they in turn treat the theme in their work reveal the true extent of the connection between their work and their landscapes. This connection is a vital component of reading the *Künstlerroman* in terms of Canadian national identity. The texts that form the focus of this study offer both individual and collective demonstrations of how the themes of landscape and location make themselves felt through the authors' deployment of inter and innertextual narrative strategies, as well as through the portrayal of the protagonists' connection to their landscapes.<sup>204</sup>

Emily has an intense and quintessentially Romantic relationship with nature; she takes solace and inspiration from her surrounding landscape, and her creative talent is signalled by her sensitivity to natural beauty. An early manifestation of this is her habit of personification. She provides herself with a cast of imaginary friends and familiars, and allocates them starring roles from the start, from the trees she names 'Adam' and 'Eve', to the 'wind woman' who sweeps through them: 'She is tall and misty, with thin, grey, silky clothes blowing all about her – and wings like a bat's – only you can see through them – and shining eyes like stars looking through her long, loose hair. She can fly – but to-night she will walk with me.'<sup>205</sup> This imagining might initially appear insubstantial and wispy, but it is important for the non-Canadian reader to be alert to the conditions of the Canadian climate. Gammel has pointed this out in her 2002 essay on Montgomery's 'Erotic Landscapes', reminding readers that the 'gale-force winds are a well-known

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<sup>204</sup> By 'innertextual', I mean the creative output of the protagonists within the texts.

<sup>205</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p5.

feature of the Canadian Maritimes<sup>206</sup> and that the Wind Woman is thus a more potent and powerful figure than one might initially presume. Gammel goes on to suggest that 'Emily's imagining of nature's strength as benevolently female presents an important feminist element in this novel – a female landscape mythology, with the Wind Woman [...] providing the heartbeat of this universe'.<sup>207</sup> It is an intriguing proposition that emphasises the centrality of the landscape to reading Emily's development as a woman, and as a creative writer; she can use her talent to generate a new understanding of the world around her, which encodes female power into the landscape.

In addition to her characters and her 'female landscape mythology', Emily's connection to the natural world is most strikingly demonstrated through the trope of her 'flash'. When her love of beauty and her love of language combine, she is overwhelmed by a moment of sublime experience:

It had always seemed to Emily, ever since she could remember, that she was very, very near to a world of wonderful beauty. Between it and herself hung only a thin curtain; she could never draw the curtain aside – but sometimes, just for a moment, a wind fluttered it and then it was as if she caught a glimpse of the enchanting realm beyond.<sup>208</sup>

The significance of Emily's 'flash' cannot be underestimated. Its mystical properties provide a subtle introduction to the supernatural and psychic episodes that are such a distinctive feature of the *Emily* trilogy. It at once establishes and validates Emily's creativity, marking her out from the beginning as a born writer, whom Marie Campbell describes as 'appear[ing] in the opening chapter fully formed, complete with a mysterious

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<sup>206</sup> Irene Gammel, 'Safe Pleasures for Girls: L.M. Montgomery's Erotic Landscapes', Irene Gammel (Ed.) *Making Anonlea: L.M. Montgomery and Popular Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) p119 (pp114-131).

<sup>207</sup> Gammel, 'Safe Pleasures for Girls', p119.

<sup>208</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p7.

‘flash’ of creative insight and an irresistible impulse to translate reality into words’.<sup>209</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, the most revealing thing about the ‘flash’ is its inextricable alignment with Emily’s passion for the natural landscape. Throughout the trilogy, this association is maintained and developed. As a child, Emily recalls the moments that have brought the flash to her: ‘To-night [sic] the dark boughs against that far-off sky had given it. It had come with the high, wild note of wind in the night, with a shadow wave over a ripe field, with a greybird lighting on her window-sill in a storm’.<sup>210</sup> And while Montgomery emphasises that Emily cannot summon this experience at will, or predict when it will visit her, she nevertheless establishes a pattern of close association of the ‘flash’ with landscape and nature, presenting the reader with this ‘extract’ from the twenty-three year old Emily’s private journal:

‘You are mine,’ called the sea beyond Blair Water.

‘We have a share in her,’ said the hills.

‘She is my sister,’ said a polly fir-tree.

Looking at them the flash came – my old supernal moment.<sup>211</sup>

The ‘flash’ is an intensely private experience for Emily – even her beloved father fails to understand it – and she never attempts to confide it again. This is characteristic; her enjoyment of nature is frequently solitary and can exclude even her closest friends and family members. Indeed, at the beginning of the trilogy, the imaginative and introverted child frequently appears closer to her ‘characters’ than to real people. In this light, it is surprising how Emily (who barely remembers her own mother, and whose early life before *New Moon* lacks a positive female presence) genders her relationship with nature; she follows the tradition of female personification with her ‘wind woman’ and her ‘fairies

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<sup>209</sup> Marie Campbell, ‘Wedding Bells and Death Knells: The Writer as a Bride in the *Emily* Trilogy’, Mary Henley Rubio (Ed.) *Harvesting Thistles: The Textual Garden of L.M. Montgomery* (Guelph: Canadian Children’s Press, 1994) p137 (pp137-145).

<sup>210</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p7.

<sup>211</sup> Montgomery, *Emily’s Quest*, p158.

of the countryside<sup>212</sup>, yet does not seem to seek a maternal 'mother nature'. Despite her orphan status, she does not seek a surrogate family in her imaginative understanding of the landscape. Rather, she relates to the forces of the natural world as companions or equals, highlighting her affinity rather than a sense of dependence. As in the dialogue with the sea and the hills, Emily is a peer and 'sister' rather than a supplicant. This affinity, when combined with the trope of the 'flash', firmly establishes Emily's status as a naturally (in every sense of the word) gifted writer, with an intensely personal bond to her surrounding landscape.

This empathetic bond with a personified nature is something that does not diminish as Emily grows up. What is precocious and charming (if a little over-whimsical) in a child is rather more unsettling in a young woman. Emily embraces her fancies throughout her adolescence, and with an increasingly sensual dimension: "Such loveliness as this doesn't seem real," murmured Emily. 'It's so wonderful it *hurts* me [...] I hear the Wind Woman running with soft, soft footsteps over the hill. I shall always think of the wind as a personality [...] a laughing girl when she comes from the west'.<sup>213</sup> This intensification is echoed in the way the adolescent Emily experiences the 'flash'. It has always had a profoundly sensual dimension that Gammel recognises as 'pagan and [...] physical',<sup>214</sup> but it is now progressively eroticised as Emily's sexuality awakens and develops. Her 'flash' is described by Montgomery in terms of an auto-erotic experience, providing a complete and consuming satisfaction that Emily can only find in these moments of communion with her writing and her landscape: 'Oh – beauty – Emily shivered with the pure ecstasy of it. She loved it – it filled her being tonight as never before. She was afraid to move or breathe lest she break the current of beauty that was

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<sup>212</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p6.

<sup>213</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p175. Italics in original.

<sup>214</sup> Gammel, 'Safe Pleasures for Girls', p121.

flowing through her'.<sup>215</sup> These passages of communion retain a powerfully physical eroticism that haunts the text.

Ultimately, however, Emily grows past the point where she can find physical and mental fulfilment through this connection to nature. By the time of *Emily's Quest* she is increasingly dissatisfied with her single life, and Montgomery candidly describes the loneliness that cannot be assuaged by a successful career or a beautiful landscape: 'Alone? Ay, that was it. Always alone [...] She had some very glorious hours of inspiration and achievement. But mere beauty which had once satisfied her soul could not wholly satisfy it now'.<sup>216</sup> Instead, Emily increasingly uses her connection to nature as a way of expressing her unhappiness. Embracing the pathetic fallacy, she aligns herself to dismal weather, to restless fields, to decaying autumn leaves:

The poor dead leaves [...] There was still enough unquiet life left in them to make them restless and forlorn. They harkened yet to every call of the wind, which cared for them no longer [...] Why should they - and I - be vexed with these transient, passionate breaths of desire for a life which passed us by?<sup>217</sup>

Here, Emily directly links herself to the helpless, dying foliage – and indirectly links Teddy Kent to the independent, careless wind. It seems that Emily uses landscape imagery to code and conceal her most private feelings. She can admit she sees herself in the leaves, but will not allow herself to follow the imagery to its logical conclusion and voice the association of the wind and Teddy.

This is a frequently deployed tactic of disassociation – the feelings that Emily cannot permit herself are transferred to nature and landscape. Her friendship with Ilse is increasingly strained by Emily's suppressed sense of rivalry. She can acknowledge that

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<sup>215</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p177.

<sup>216</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p221.

<sup>217</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p153.



she feels unfavourably compared to the more obviously attractive Ilse – ‘What chance could her own moonlit charm of dark and silver have against that gold and ivory loveliness?’<sup>218</sup> – but she is reluctant to acknowledge how much she resents Ilse for this. She can, however, transfer the feelings to her garden and only five pages later Emily spitefully vents her frustrations and jealousy through ‘innocent’ botanical observations that ally the confident, golden and unconventional Ilse with the chrysanthemums and Emily herself with the pale, elegant rose:

The rose is a song and a dream and an enchantment all in one. The ‘mums are very pretty, too, but it does not do to have them and the rose too near together. Seen by themselves they are handsome, bright blossoms, pink and yellow, and cheery, looking very well satisfied with themselves. But set the rose behind them and the change is actually amusing. They then seem like vulgar, frowsy kitchen maids beside a stately, white queen.<sup>219</sup>

Emily is still reluctant to admit both the extent of her feelings for Teddy and the jealousy of Ilse that those feelings provoke. She is equally reticent when it comes to admitting her own particular powers of attraction, although this is clearly the subtext of the comparison between the ‘vulgar, frowsy’ chrysanthemums and the ‘enchantment’ of the rose. However much she defends Ilse’s flirtations and professes to admire her distinctively showy sense of style, this outburst reveals a more judgemental and disapproving dynamic to their relationship. The flowers provide Emily with both a code and a vent for her feelings, and the passage is a rare insight into her suppressed emotions.

Not surprisingly, Emily’s creative writing is as much influenced by the natural landscape as her personality. She roams the woods and fields in search of inspiration, and writes poetic responses to the natural world. Montgomery’s own poetry was of a similar

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<sup>218</sup> Montgomery, *Emily’s Quest*, p121.

<sup>219</sup> Montgomery, *Emily’s Quest*, p126.

ilk,<sup>220</sup> and through Emily, she promotes a conceptualisation of the poet as ‘one who searches for beauty and attempts to share that beauty with others, and who has a peculiar sensitivity to beauty’.<sup>221</sup> Beauty is inextricably allied to nature in Montgomery’s poetics and neither she nor Emily seems able to describe one without recourse to the imagery of the other. At the same time, especially in the early stages of the trilogy, when Emily’s writing is still the doggerel of a precocious child, Montgomery frequently adopts a strikingly ambivalent tone: ‘Everybody who has ever lived in the world and could string two rhymes together has written a poem on spring. It is the most be-rhymed subject in the world – and always will be, because it is poetry incarnate itself.’<sup>222</sup> There is a tension here, between the dismissive tone of ‘string two rhymes together’ and the confident assertion that spring is ‘poetry incarnate’, that is problematic to resolve. The tension seems to centre on the accusations of cliché and predictability that face the nature-poet, as well as making a clear distinction between the beauty of the subject and the banality of the verse it generally inspires. If responses to nature may be divided between the sublime and the beautiful, Montgomery appears to push Emily towards the sublime – the supernatural element of the ‘flash’ and the developing desire to avoid being a ‘scribbler of pretty stories’<sup>223</sup> suggest a creative talent that will and must develop beyond the sentimental platitudes of her early verse. This struggle is an important part of Emily’s creative development, especially as her creative landscape progresses through her career.

Emily’s landscape is always explicitly Canadian, and in her writing she seems increasingly drawn to its wilder and rougher elements. Revealingly, she rejects the poetry of Keats, complaining that ‘Keats *is* too full of beauty. When I read his poetry I feel

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<sup>220</sup> For examples of this, see L.M. Montgomery, *The Watchman* (London: Dodo Press, 2008), especially the first two sections ‘Songs of Sea’ and ‘Songs of the Hills and Woods’.

<sup>221</sup> E. Holly Pike, ‘(Re)Producing Canadian Literature: L.M. Montgomery’s *Emily* Novels’, Irene Gammel & Elizabeth Epperly (Eds.) *L.M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p67 (pp64-73).

<sup>222</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p227.

<sup>223</sup> Montgomery, *Emily’s Quest*, p31.

stifled in roses and long for a breath of frosty air or the austerity of a chill mountain peak'.<sup>224</sup> Her criticism explicitly differentiates her Canadian Romanticism from the English tradition of Keats. Emily seems to equate Keats with a suffocating level of sentiment that is inappropriate in a climate as dangerous as her own. Montgomery's Edwardian sensibilities may reject the literary experimentations associated with Modernism as crude and unnecessary, but she is equally hostile towards what she perceives as sentimental. In a crucial speech, Emily's dying mentor warns her to 'Remember – pine woods are just as real as – pigsties';<sup>225</sup> in other words, while 'realism' is linked to undesirable vulgarity, it is made clear that there is more to the alternative than 'pretty stories'. Mr. Carpenter's choice of 'pine woods' rather than the 'roses' of Keats urges Emily back towards the wilder elements of her natural world and realigns her with the sublime rather than the sentimental.

In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Del shares this ambivalence towards the more sentimental or idealised manifestations of literature. Her first forays into fiction may be melodramatic and represent a rejection of 'real' life, but they are also distinguished by a rejection of the pastoral idyll and an attention to corporeal detail: 'For this novel I had changed Jubilee, too, or picked out some features of it and ignored others. It became an older, darker, more decaying town [...] The season was always the height of summer – white, brutal heat, dogs lying as if dead on the sidewalk.'<sup>226</sup> Del's mindset may tend toward the Gothic rather than the Romantic, but the impulse towards transformation is still the key. Still, this does not equate with detachment. Del may not have the constantly loving connection with the landscape that Emily possesses, but she is aware of it. When on the road selling dictionaries with her mother, Del observes that: 'We drove through country we did not know we loved – not rolling or flat, but broken, no recognizable

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<sup>224</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p257. Italics in original.

<sup>225</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p24.

<sup>226</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p243.

rhythm to it; low hills, hollows full of brush, swap and bush and fields. Tall elm trees [...] doomed but we did not know that either.<sup>227</sup> The repeated avowals of ignorance ‘we did not know’ suggest that on one level Del takes her surroundings for granted, but they are qualified by the lyrical description, and the time-shift in the narrative tone that suggests this is knowledge Del comes to possess, and reinforces the sense that Del comes to value her landscape even if she does not idealise it. Where Emily is fascinated by beauty, Del is fascinated by flaws, and has a keen eye for the grotesque. A dead cow appears with ‘black flies [...] crawling and clustering on its brown and white hide, sparkling where the sun caught them like beaded embroidery’.<sup>228</sup> The imagery is striking – a crafted balance of the repulsive and the intricately beautiful – and this process of juxtaposition characterises Del’s appreciation of the nature and landscape. She is attuned to its curiosities, its potential monstrosity and its capacity to disconcert.

There are points when Munro aligns Del to a more conventional landscape vocabulary. In her teens, Del says that ‘For a year or two I had been looking at trees, fields, landscapes with a secret, strong exaltation. In some moods, some days, I could feel for a clump of grass [...] such pure unbounded emotion as I used to hope for [...] in connection with God’.<sup>229</sup> But Munro immediately complicates this spiritual connection by explicitly highlighting its pagan physicality in deeply disturbing terms.<sup>230</sup> Del first voices this connection as she drives through the countryside with Mr. Chamberlain, an adult man who has been covertly groping her at every recent opportunity. In his company, Del feels ‘the whole of nature [is] debased, maddeningly erotic’<sup>231</sup> and she is unsettlingly accepting of his sexual approaches. They take a walk together, and he masturbates in front of her. I posit that Del expresses her own developing sexuality through her

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<sup>227</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p67.

<sup>228</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p44.

<sup>229</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p165.

<sup>230</sup> Terms that could never be available to Montgomery, at least not in her published writing.

<sup>231</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p165.

description of this scene – it is Del who feels ‘debased’ and ‘maddeningly erotic’, not the dull and muddy creek that is littered with ‘cigarette packages, a beer bottle, a Chiclet box lying on the grass’.<sup>232</sup> This seems born out by her final observation: ‘The landscape was postcoital, distant and meaningless’.<sup>233</sup> One response to this apparent act of projection would be to argue that Del finds the experience with Mr. Chamberlain so disturbing that she uses the landscape to disassociate herself from what has happened; she assigns the meaningless debasement to the creek so as to avoid associating it with her own body. And yet this response does not do justice to the complexity of Del’s feelings. What genuinely frightens and disturbs Del is not so much the sight of Mr. Chamberlain masturbating as it is the accepted social convention that, as a woman, sex will be a destructive factor in her life unless it is limited to the established confines of marriage: ‘advice that assumed being female made you damageable’.<sup>234</sup> She wants to reject this assumption, and claim the freedom to explore her sexuality with the impunity traditionally reserved for men – she wants her sexuality to be free-range rather than fenced in. In this respect, her decision to project her feelings onto the landscape seems to be about establishing a connection rather than creating a distance. The natural landscape is both conventionally understood as female (Mother Nature) and conventionally understood as resilient (the renewal of Spring, the capacity for re-growth). Linking her sexual experiences to the landscape establishes Del’s strength rather than her violation. The landscape is beyond damage from Mr. Chamberlain – the concept of him having sufficient power for it to be otherwise is ludicrous – and so too then is Del beyond his reach.<sup>235</sup>

If landscape is crucial to understanding Del’s developing sexuality, it is also crucial in understanding her development as a writer. As mentioned previously, Del is

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<sup>232</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p166.

<sup>233</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p167.

<sup>234</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p173.

<sup>235</sup> For more on this, see p167-169.

initially enamoured with transforming Jubilee, which she does through a melodramatic Gothic novel. Inspired by a local tragedy, Del delights in exorcising the real family from her narrative, replacing them with more romantic versions that better fit her views on literature. Her heroine, Caroline, is completely detached from the source material: 'She came ready-made into my mind, taunting and secretive, blotting out altogether that pudgy Marion'.<sup>236</sup> But when Del's encounter with Bobby – brother of Marion – provokes the realisation that she wants to record life rather than romanticise it, the realisation is developed most fully in terms of place rather than people: 'And no list could hold what I wanted, for what I wanted was every last thing, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together – radiant, everlasting'.<sup>237</sup> This shift – prefigured by her earlier aside about the 'country we did not know we loved'<sup>238</sup> – offers a concluding picture of Del as a writer who will relate to landscape without sentiment or melodrama, portraying instead the more difficult ways in which it exerts its significance in people's lives. This idea is reinforced by the suggestion that *Lives of Girls and Women* is Del's fiction as well as her narrative, a suggestion that Howells says is 'written into the text we have just finished reading'.<sup>239</sup> The text itself – which is rich in striking descriptions of the locations and landscape – can therefore best represent Del's understanding as well as Munro's.

*Who Do You Think You Are?* has many similarities to *Lives of Girls and Women*, but this suggestion that the narrative is 'by' as well as about the protagonist is not one of them, and Rose's career in theatre reinforces the separation. Rose's relationship with landscape can then be more usefully read in terms of performance than language, and there are some striking examples of this emphasis throughout the collection. Early in the

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<sup>236</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p243.

<sup>237</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p249.

<sup>238</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p67.

<sup>239</sup> Coral Ann Howells, *Alice Munro: Contemporary World Writers*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) p50.

text, Munro describes Canadian birdlife in glowing terms that would not be out of place in an *Emily* book. She refers to 'A red headed woodpecker; an oriole; a bluejay; a Canada Goose'. Their plumage is vivid, 'colours clear and long-lasting' and they are located in beautiful settings, '[b]ackgrounds of pure snow, of blossoming branches, of heady summer sky'.<sup>240</sup> Rose recollects these birds with a salient intensity of detail and pleasure – they are richer and brighter than anything else in her childhood – but they are not real. They are pictures on the schoolroom wall, some teacher's 'first and last hopeful effort'<sup>241</sup> at introducing beauty into the children's environment. Rose recalls that these pictures did not merely decorate the schoolroom – for her at least, they offered an escape from it: 'what they seemed to represent was not the birds themselves, not those skies and snows, but some other world of hardy innocence, bounteous information, privileged light-heartedness'.<sup>242</sup> She does not merely acknowledge the 'unreality' of the pictures; she delights in it. They are the 'one thing in the school [that] was captivating, lovely'.<sup>243</sup> The pictures appeal to her every bit as much as poetry appears to Emily, offering a creative mediation between fact and fiction. For Rose, the representation is preferable to the reality – a useful manifesto for an aspiring actress.

Later in the 'Wild Swans' section, Munro describes an encounter between Rose and a minister on a train that is reminiscent of Del's involvement with Mr. Chamberlain. The minister takes a seat next to Rose, and under the cover of his newspaper, slides his hand between her legs. But while Del's sexuality is associated with the surrounding landscape, Rose's is far more abstract. Firstly, the setting reinforces the idea of Rose as a character who is most comfortable in transition – through the windows of the train, Rose observes landscape in a state of illusory motion – 'the Niagara Escarpment above Dundas [...] the preglacial valley, the silver wooded rubble of little hills, as they came

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<sup>240</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p40.

<sup>241</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p40.

<sup>242</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p40.

<sup>243</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p40.

sliding down to the shores of Lake Ontario'.<sup>244</sup> Secondly, it is striking that the 'Wild Swans' of the title were not actually witnessed by Rose herself. When the minister first gets on the train, he makes conversation with her, telling her about '[a] whole great flock of swans. What a lovely sight they were'.<sup>245</sup> It is this second-hand image that comes back to Rose as she orgasms: 'a flock of birds, wild swans even [...] exploding from it, taking to the sky'.<sup>246</sup> The return to bird imagery recalls the ideas of escapism suggested by the schoolroom pictures, and emphasises the capacity for flight that Rose coveted in them. Yet she does not take flight from the minister's assault. While I would not suggest that his brief conversation about the swans is in any way seductive to Rose, in light of Del's eroticism of the actual landscape during the encounter with Mr. Chamberlain, I would argue that Rose uses a similar tactic here in eroticising the *image* of the swans, and this underscores the fact that her primary fascination is with the imaginary and inner landscapes of the mind than with her actual physical surroundings. For Rose, the idea of the landscape holds far more appeal than the landscape itself.

This gap between imagined and actual landscapes is developed upon in *A Bird in the House*. The young Vanessa is given to inventing melodramatic thrillers, but frequently grows disillusioned with them when she is forced to think about them in the context of her everyday life. When she begins a pioneer epic, she is disgusted to realise she is writing about the contemporaries of her own forbidding Grandfather Connor: 'If pioneers were like *that*, I had thought, my pen would be better deployed elsewhere'.<sup>247</sup> Vanessa's romantic sensibilities receive a further blow when her father decides that Piquette Tonnerre should join the family on vacation to the lake, so she can recuperate from tuberculosis of the bones. Vanessa is both intrigued and repelled by their guest. Despite her father's liberal altruism, Vanessa regards Piquette as irrevocably Other, repeating the

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<sup>244</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p83.

<sup>245</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p79.

<sup>246</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p85.

<sup>247</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p56. Italics in original.



locally received opinion of the Tonnerres that: 'They did not belong among the Cree of the Galloping Mountain reservation, further north, and they did not belong among the Scots-Irish and Ukrainians of Manawaka, either. They were, as my Grandmother MacLeod would have put it, neither fish, fowl, nor good salt-herring.'<sup>248</sup> Laurence uses Piquette to expose Vanessa's naïvety: Vanessa, a fan of Pauline Johnson, expects Piquette to entertain her with 'some of the secrets which she undoubtedly knew – where the whippoorwill made her nest, how the coyote reared her young, or whatever it was that it said in Hiawatha'.<sup>249</sup> She has unquestioningly accepted the cultural mythology created around First Nations people, even as she has accepted the prejudices of her community towards the Tonnerres, leading to an awkward duality in her attitude towards Piquette. Vanessa's approaches to the older girl are both wary and patronising – the strange combination that results from Vanessa's willingness to respect Piquette as a 'junior prophetess of the wilds'<sup>250</sup> and her inability to value anything else about her. Piquette's rejection underscores the clichéd nature of Vanessa's assumptions and further shakes Vanessa's faith in her received cultural mythologies. Her grandfather has already disillusioned her about pioneers, and she is comprehensively disillusioned about Indians too: 'as an Indian, Piquette was a dead loss'.<sup>251</sup> Vanessa has searched for, and expected to find, the romance of the prairie, and has instead been faced with reality in the form of two of the least romanticised characters possible.

Laurence's introduction of Piquette into *A Bird in the House* effectively exposes the limitations of Vanessa's worldview through the failure of Vanessa and Piquette to reach any sort of mutual understanding. The 'vast history of socio-political inequality between them'<sup>252</sup> inhibits a true dialogue. Instead then of a cross-cultural connection

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<sup>248</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p96.

<sup>249</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p100.

<sup>250</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p100.

<sup>251</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p102.

<sup>252</sup> Paul Comeau, *Laurence's Epic Imagination* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005), p107.

between the two young girls, Laurence uses the trip to the lake to provide a poignant moment of connection between Vanessa and her father. They go out to listen to the loons together – an activity vehemently rejected by Piquette, who asserts that ‘You wouldn’t catch me walkin’ way down there jus’ for a bunch of squawkin’ birds’.<sup>253</sup> But the ‘squawking’ birds’ are both beautiful and endangered, providing an effective and appropriate backdrop for this moment between Vanessa and the father she is about to lose:

At night the lake was like black glass with a streak of amber which was the path of the moon [...] No one can ever describe that ululating sound, the crying of the loons [...] Plaintive, and yet with a quality of chilling mockery, those voices belonged to a world separated by aeons from our neat world.<sup>254</sup>

After her father’s premature death, the memory of this night is both precious and painful to Vanessa, but her feelings are further complicated by her continued sense of awkward association with Piquette: ‘I knew a little more than I had that summer at Diamond Lake, but I could not reach her now any more than I could then’.<sup>255</sup> It takes a return to Diamond Lake – after Piquette has been killed in the house fire – for Vanessa to begin understanding both the pain of her father’s death and the shame she feels about Piquette’s. Laurence ends the story with a pointed and poignant twist of narrative irony, revealing two changes to this landscape that has become so important in Vanessa’s memory. Firstly, recent building developments have driven away the last of the loons. Secondly, Diamond Lake has ‘been re-named Lake Wapakata, for it was felt that *an Indian name would have a greater appeal to tourists*’.<sup>256</sup> Vanessa finally appreciates how the commodification of Métis culture that she initially participated in has distorted both the history and the geography of her community.

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<sup>253</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p103.

<sup>254</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p102.

<sup>255</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p104.

<sup>256</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p107. My italics.

Vanessa's increasing antipathy towards a romanticised cultural landscape is understandable, but it is also ultimately limiting for her creativity. As mentioned, she is initially presented as an enthusiastic (if naïve) writer, constantly at work on some project or other – the ill fated pioneer epic, a love story set in Ancient Egypt, an adventure that takes place among the fur-trappers of Quebec. Her gusto for her subjects may outweigh her knowledge of them, but this does not hinder her: 'Orphaned young, Marie was forced to work at the Inn of the Grey Cat. *La Chat? Le Chat?* And what was Grey? They didn't teach French until high school in Manawaka, and I wasn't there yet. But never mind. These were trivial details.'<sup>257</sup> However, as Vanessa grows more cynical, she loses the desire to finish this story. The real world has disappointed her, and the fictional world is too ethereal and abstract to offer comfort: 'I no longer wanted to finish the story. What was the use, if she [Marie] couldn't get out except by ruses which clearly wouldn't happen in real life?'.<sup>258</sup> Vanessa's creativity is thus curtailed by her disenchantment with her cultural mythology – a mythology that is closely allied to the presentation of the Canadian landscape.

Perhaps the most detailed portrait of a protagonist's literary engagement with landscape after Montgomery's comes in Laurence's *The Diviners*. As with Emily, Morag is immediately established as having a close and complex working relationship with the idea of landscape. In early childhood she even has her own imaginary friends, who, like Emily's, seem mostly drawn from nature: 'Peony. Rosa Picardy. Cowboy Jack. Blue-Sky Mother.'<sup>259</sup> The name 'Blue-Sky Mother' is especially evocative of Montgomery, suggesting a kindred spirit of Emily's Wind Woman. This aspect of Morag's childhood inner-life is not explored in great detail, but the information Laurence does provide is tantalising. As an adult, Morag guiltily reveals that '*I remember those imaginary characters better*

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<sup>257</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p153. Italics in original

<sup>258</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p153.

<sup>259</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p11.

than I do my parents<sup>260</sup> and the confession highlights how much of her childhood memories – her ‘snapshots’ – take place outside:

The child sits on the front steps of the house.<sup>261</sup>

The child, three years old, is standing behind the heavy-wire-netted farm gate, peering out.<sup>262</sup>

The child is standing among the spruce trees at the side of the house [...]

Now those spruce trees, there, they were really and actually as tall as angels.<sup>263</sup>

Drawn to the outdoors – or sent there to avoid her ailing parents – the Morag of the ‘snapshots’ is a solitary and imaginative child: *‘I played alone, mostly, as it was too far to go to seek out other kids. I don’t think I minded. I preferred my spruce-house family’*.<sup>264</sup> Unlike Emily, the adult Morag considers the origins of her imaginary friends in psychoanalytic terms (or at least pseudo-psychoanalytic ones) and draws an explicit link between her invention of the characters and her parents’ illness. But locating the origins of her imaginary friends does not equate to a complete renunciation of them. The ‘Blue-Sky Mother’ fades away from Morag’s inner life, but while the adult Emily continues to think of her Wind Woman, Morag discourses with the altogether less ethereal figure of Catherine Parr Traill. As discussed previously, Parr Traill was not just one of the first chroniclers of the Canadian landscape, but one of its first (English language) chroniclers full stop. Her work contributed substantially to the European perception of Canada, and was characterised by her brand of insistently common-sense advice. Morag imagines whole conversations between herself and Parr Traill that contrast two very different experiences of life in rural Canada.

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<sup>260</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p12. Italics in original.

<sup>261</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p7.

<sup>262</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p8.

<sup>263</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p11.

<sup>264</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p11. Italics in original.

Morag initially seems to take a wry, satirical pleasure in the differences between herself and Catherine Parr Traill: '[Parr Traill] one could be quite certain, would not have been found of an early morning sitting over a fourth cup of coffee [...] No. No such sloth for Catherine P. T.'<sup>265</sup> One does not get the impression that Morag has any desire to emulate the alternative schedule she imagines Parr Traill would have followed: 'Breakfast cooked for the multitude. Out to feed the chickens, stopping briefly on the way back to pull fourteen armloads of weeds out of the vegetable garden and perhaps prune the odd apple tree in passing'.<sup>266</sup> There is an element of admiration at the start of the recital, but the obvious absurdity of Morag's exaggeration makes it clear that not only will she herself not follow this pattern, but that no one is physically capable of such prolific industry. And yet despite this acknowledgment, Morag's 'conversations' with Parr Traill tend to be antagonistic, and the voice she assigns to Catherine is unsympathetic and admonitory. Morag knows that the workload she has imagined for Catherine is completely unrealistic, but she still berates herself for failing to match up to it. Catherine's imagined domestic concerns are accorded precedence over Morag's real emotional ones. When Morag is worried about her missing daughter, the voice she assigns to Catherine is dismissive and patronising: 'we were at one time surrounded by forest fires which threatened the crops, fences, stock, stable, cabin, furniture and, of course, children. Your situation, if I may say so, can scarcely be termed comparable'.<sup>267</sup> Morag's personification of Parr Traill appears an increasingly masochistic exercise. She invokes Parr Traill as a pioneer super-woman, perhaps one of the most self-satisfied of the spectres haunting Canada's landscape mythology: 'I, as you know, managed both to write books, with some modest degree of success, while at the same time cultivating my

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<sup>265</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p96.

<sup>266</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p96.

<sup>267</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p97.

plot of land and rearing my dear children, of whom I bore nine, seven of whom lived'.<sup>268</sup> Morag, who has an overgrown farm plot, a difficult relationship with her only daughter and a bad case of writer's block, attacks her own insecurities through these imagined conversations.

In *A Bird in the House*, Laurence outlined the conflict between the 'pioneer' generation of Canadians and their grandchildren. In *The Diviners* the generational gap is extended, but this does nothing to resolve the ambivalent nature of the relationship between Morag and her imaginary predecessor. Finally, Morag can no longer accept Parr Traill's version of the landscape and banishes her for good: 'I'll never till those blasted fields, but this place is some kind of garden [...] I'm about to quit worrying about not being neither an old or a new pioneer. So farewell, sweet saint'.<sup>269</sup> In banishing Parr Traill, Morag can claim back control of her own space – mental and physical – and accept that living in the countryside does not make it mandatory for her to be a botanist and housewife like Parr Traill, or a hard-labouring domestic farmer like her neighbour Maudie, or even to participate in a Canadian literary hagiography by idealising Parr Traill's achievements at the expense of her own. Instead, Morag can continue to engage with landscape through her chosen medium of literature.

This is a process that is rooted back in Morag's childhood, when language and landscape exert a twin fascination for her. During the years she lives with Christie and Prin, she loves to hear Christie's stories, and the mythology he creates for her informs her sense of both Scotland and Canada. A more formal introduction to the combination of landscape and language comes from her teacher, Miss Melrose. Miss Melrose, with her disciplinarian style and her promotion of classic poetry, is in many ways set up as an oppositional figure to Christie's tradition of colloquial folklore. She pushes Morag to develop a better style of writing – albeit one that follows her own preferences:

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<sup>268</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p170.

<sup>269</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p406.

Some things work and other things don't work. Like the Pathetic Fallacy.

You can't say *The clouds swooped teasingly over the town, promising rain*, on account of clouds don't feel – they just *Are*. Wordsworth used the Pathetic Fallacy, of course, but Miss Melrose is not a great fan of Wordsworth's.<sup>270</sup>

While this regimental approach to teaching may seem the antithesis of Christie's rambling monologues, Morag's two mentors nevertheless share a common foe. Christie is also less than impressed with the wanders of William: "What the hell is this crap? *I wandered lonely as a cloud*. This Wordsworth now, he was a pansy, girl, or no, maybe a daffodil? Clouds don't wander lonely, for the good christ's sake. Any man daft enough to write a line like that, he wanted his head looked at..."<sup>271</sup> This double-barrelled attack is initially reminiscent of Emily's objections to Keats. The poem targeted is quintessentially English Romantic, as is the landscape presented, and this could therefore be read along the same lines as Emily's objections to Keats – as a call for a more Canadian type of Romanticism that is not bound to English conventions – and appreciates the difference between a landscape where daffodils blow in the spring breeze and one where spring breezes frequently blow in several inches of freezing snow. And Wordsworth, even more so than Keats, represents the archetypal poet of the English establishment: a dead, white, increasingly conservative, male poet laureate. His dismissal could signify an opportunity for Morag to reject the traditions inherent in his poetry and create her own. But it is important to note that Morag explicitly resists Miss Melrose and chooses to understand landscape on her own terms:

She is suddenly convinced that the bridge is trying to send her plunging  
down into the ravine. She holds onto a willow branch and it supports her.

Pathetic Fallacy? What if Miss Melrose is wrong [...] Not that clouds or that

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<sup>270</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p121. Italics in original.

<sup>271</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p63. Italics in original.

would have *human* feelings, but that the trees and river and even this bridge  
might have their own spirits?<sup>272</sup>

Here we see Morag negotiate between her two mentors, valuing both their judgements, but ultimately working towards her own style of expression. She can challenge established Nature poetry (as well as established poets) but she also demonstrates her willingness to connect with traditions as well as question them. Her sense of nature as having its 'own spirits' recalls her imaginary friends, but this time the spirits are not anthropomorphised – they remain wild and inhuman, with the potential to be either hostile or friendly at any given moment.

While Morag's career is a crucial theme throughout *The Diviners*, as the narrative progresses, Laurence provides less and less detail as to what Morag actually writes. This makes it hard to gauge accurately the influence of landscape and location on the inner-text of the novel. Morag's first published story, *Fields of Gold and Green* certainly suggests these are important ideas that motivate her writing. Morag herself describes the story as based on something that actually happened on Galloping Mountain. Her first two novels, *Spear of Innocence* and *Prospero's Child*, are explored in some detail within the text, but less is explained about *Jonah* and *Shadow of Eden*. Nora Foster Stovel has worked extensively on Laurence's editing process, and notes that among the material cut along the way was the full text of Morag's first short story 'Wild Roses'. While for the purposes of this chapter I cannot spend too much time speculating on the pre-published text, it is intriguing that this cut story suggests some relationship to the themes of nature and landscape that would have been presented in Morag's 'own words'. Instead, there remains just a brief, judgemental aside from Morag: 'Hm. Sentimental in places? The young teacher not marrying the guy because she couldn't bear to live on a farm – would that really happen?

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<sup>272</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p126. Italics in original.



Maybe all that about the wild roses is overdone? Could it be changed?'.<sup>273</sup> None of the answers are provided, but the questions reveal a lot about Morag's early concern with the theme of landscape and her desire to be realistic. And there is the possibility that there is evidence those early concerns have not been neglected. Just as some critics view *Lives of Girls and Women* as a work 'by' Del,<sup>274</sup> so too can *The Diviners* be open to a reading that casts the text as Morag's magnum opus. If one chooses to take this view, it opens up the inner-textual framework of *The Diviners* and showcases Laurence's thematic concerns on two simultaneous levels. With the complexities of Morag's approach to the landscape in her life and work in mind, it becomes strikingly apparent that all five of these creative protagonists relate to their landscapes in terms of both a personal and a professional dynamic, and it is exceptionally difficult, if not impossible, to separate the two or to establish which element of the relationship is ultimately responsible for the origination of the other. Does the theme of landscape become manifest in their creative careers because of a certain personal predisposition, or is it rather a case that their careers are responsible for a heightened awareness of landscape in their personal lives? Either way, it becomes evident that the inner-geography of the protagonists' psyches is every bit as challenging as the physical geography of their home nation.

For ultimately, in considering the role of landscape and location within the texts that form this study, several key points are raised about the nature of the Canadian female *Künstlerroman* that deserve reiterating. Primarily there is the significance of the landscape in making these texts explicitly Canadian. All the texts are geographically and psychologically located within the nation, reinforcing their status as part of Canadian literary culture, and in the case of Montgomery, creating an extraordinary level of commercial interest and industry. They portray communities that are at once completely recognisable and completely unique, from Montgomery's pastoral landscapes to Munro's

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<sup>273</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p124.

<sup>274</sup> Howells, *Alice Munro*, p50.

dusty small-town villages, and Laurence goes even further, developing a carefully crafted and richly textured fictional location that takes on a life and a history of its own. The protagonists and their families are used to explore different historical perspectives on Canadian identities that establish the foundations for a discussion about characterising literature in national terms. This fusion of the personal and the political allows for a searing degree of insight into the individual and collective construction of Canadian identities, as the protagonists negotiate between their family heritage and their own need for autonomy. This process leads to acceptance (as when Emily finally learns to joke about her family's infuriating habit of assigning all her physical features to various ancestors) as well as estrangement (seen in Del's rejection of her mother) and the dynamic between these two states is frequently one of circularity and resolution rather than a linear momentum (a theme that is perhaps most explicit in *The Diviners*, where the river motif underlines Morag's increasing recognition that she has returned to her roots). The protagonists' search for a sense of home reinforces the psychological connection to the theme of location, as well as reinterpreting and challenging the conventionally gendered divide between the public realm of work and business as masculine and the domestic, private space as feminine. For not only do these protagonists reject this divide through their chosen careers and cross over into that public space, but, especially in the case of the writers, they also further complicate the divide by working from within the home. This is most explicitly demonstrated by Emily and Morag, who are portrayed as combining their personal and professional lives under the same roof, with both positive and potentially difficult consequences for their writing. Lastly, and most importantly when reading these texts as *Künstlerromans*, the protagonists' personal and professional relationships with their surrounding landscape emphasise the importance of its influence upon their creativity. The natural world is a frequent source of their earliest inspirations, while their geographical and social locations exert a compelling sway over their attitude

towards the artist's role in portraying her society and her landscape. In particular, the *Emily* trilogy and *The Diviners* testify to the continuing importance of the landscape theme in providing both a foundation and a framework of intertextuality, connecting Canadian women's writing throughout the twentieth-century and providing their creative protagonists with a powerful and personally significant source of inspiration throughout their careers.

## *Chapter Two*

### *Childhood and Creative Apprenticeships*

*Little girls are cute and small only to adults. To one another they are not cute. They are life-sized.*

*~ Margaret Atwood*

## Introduction

The *Künstlerroman* is essentially a narrative of development, and while few artists achieve success in childhood, it remains imperative that the protagonists' creative origins are explored through the portrayal of their earliest years, their family lives and their experiences of education. Of course, this development is not necessarily linear – indeed, Montgomery is the only writer to 'begin at the beginning' in terms of characterisation and chronology<sup>1</sup> – but it must nevertheless be present in order to generate the depth of character progression that I believe the *Künstlerroman* requires. This thesis will follow a linear chronology and consider first the presentation of the protagonists' childhoods, the first manifestations of their creative talents and impulses, and the differing degrees of their early commitment to an artistic career. For in the *Künstlerroman*, childhood is not simply a period of personal growth and progression – it is also the formative stage of the artist, a time of hard work, early inspiration and first setbacks, as the protagonists embark on their creative apprenticeships. But as well as considering the childhood, one must also consider the child. As outlined in the introduction, the *Künstlerroman* narrative incorporates elements of both nature *and* nurture when explaining the development of the artist, and so before moving on to discuss the events and circumstances of the protagonists' childhoods, it is necessary to pause and examine the 'raw material'.

In Carl D. Malmgren's previously mentioned article on the *Künstlerroman*, he identifies three crucial devices that can be deployed to signify that 'the artist is a *marked* man [sic]'.<sup>2</sup> These are worth recapping here, as a framework of comparison upon which to consider the five *Künstlerroman* protagonists of this study:

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<sup>1</sup> Both Munro's narratives are framed and interrupted by flashes of retrospect, *A Bird in the House* is complicated by the degree of overlap and foreknowledge, and *The Diviners* is cyclical rather than linear in structure.

<sup>2</sup> Carl D. Malmgren, 'From Work to Text: The Modernist and Postmodernist *Künstlerroman*', *A Forum on Fiction* Vol.21, No.1 (Autumn, 1987) p6 (pp5-28). Italics in original. For more on this, see p7.

- 1) the artist's name – the name itself or the act of naming sets the artist apart from the ordinary, everyday world [...]
- 2) his appearance, demeanour, carriage – certain physiological oddities serve as signs of the artist's difference, queerness, uniqueness [...]
- 3) his parentage – the artist's parents inevitably reflect his contradictory traits, his divided self, his dubious heritage<sup>3</sup>

These three signifiers are perhaps best epitomised in Montgomery's Emily Byrd Starr. She delights in her unusual name<sup>4</sup> and takes an immense and awe-struck pride when it appears in publications. Her surnames both suggest flight and elevation out of the common order, and thus symbolise her literary achievements. Emily's physical appearance is largely embedded in Edwardian models of female loveliness, being pale and slender with silky dark hair and alluring violet eyes. This is fairly standard for a Montgomery heroine: Anne Shirley eventually grows into a similar style of pale and elegant beauty; even her infamous red hair is tempered and re-branded as a classic pre-Raphaelite 'titan'.<sup>5</sup> But Emily is further distinguished by two unique quirks. Her 'high, white forehead'<sup>6</sup> traditionally signifies intellectual capabilities while her unusual pointed ears suggest her romantic nature and links to the supernatural: 'little ears that were pointed just a wee bit to show that she was kin to tribes of elfland'.<sup>7</sup> Finally, despite her initial antipathy towards her New Moon relatives, Emily grows to appreciate how she

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<sup>3</sup> Malmgren, 'From Work to Text', p6.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, Montgomery's publishers considered the name 'Emily' to be far too archaic and quaint, and pushed her to rename her protagonist – a move she stubbornly resisted. See L.M. Montgomery, *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery*, Vol.3 1921-1929, Mary Henley Rubio & Elizabeth Waterson (Eds.) (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), p67.

<sup>5</sup> This physical progression from an awkward or unusual appearance in childhood to a striking, if unconventional physical presence in young adulthood is shared by other protagonists in fiction aimed at young girls, including Kate Douglas Wiggin's Rebecca in *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1905) and Frances Hodgson Burnett's Sara Crewe in *A Little Princess* (1905).

<sup>6</sup> L.M. Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon* (New York: Random House, 2003), p5. For example, Mary Shelley was renowned by her contemporaries for this feature.

<sup>7</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p5.

herself is part of the family, and her deployment of the 'Murray look' becomes a favourite weapon in her arsenal for dealing with unwelcome attention.

Munro's approach to characterisation is not as immediately tied to this pattern of three, but there are still many elements of it at work in *Lives of Girls and Women*. Del Jordan's surname, although rarely used in the text, is suggestive of the river and evokes images of fluidity, turbulence and crossing that are especially pertinent to her developing identity. Her physical appearance is never described in detail – but her feelings about it are, and her increasing conviction that she is different from the other girls in Jubilee can be taken in this context as more than typical adolescent angst – through her feelings about her body, she manifests her feelings about herself, and the gap between the life she wants and the life that is demonstrated by characters like Naomi. The complexity of her relationship with her earnest, ambitious mother exemplifies the notion of the artist's contradictory traits and dubious heritage. Meanwhile, Munro's decision to use the name 'Rose' without a surname in *Who Do You Think You Are?* emphasises the fairytale possibilities of the name, associating her Rose with a tradition of enchantment and mythology that underlines the ways in which she subverts and disrupts the narrative pattern of 'Happily Ever After'.<sup>8</sup> As with Del, Rose is rarely described in physical detail, although in her case this potentially reinforces the sense of her inherent creativity – Rose is after all an actress, required to be physically adaptable and capable of transformation. And of course, Rose too is alienated from her family. She has few memories of her mother, a violent father, and in best fairy tale tradition, a complicated relationship with her stepmother (whose significance is best demonstrated by the text's subtitle, *Stories of Flo and Rose*).

Lastly, the most immediately distinguishing feature about Laurence's protagonists – at least in terms of Malgrem's first two principles – is their *similarity*. Vanessa

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<sup>8</sup> The name is frequently used in fairytales, including Briar Rose and Rose Red, as well as in folk songs such as 'The Rose of Tralee'.

MacLeod and Morag Gunn both have strongly Scottish names that testify to their family heritage, and the founding roots of the Manawaka colonial community. These are names that are both steeped in local historical tradition (there are MacLeods in Manawaka as far back as the events of Hagar's childhood in *The Stone Angel*) as well as cultural mythology (the stories of Piper Gunn that Christie invents for Morag). Furthermore, Vanessa and Morag are both described as having dark hair, and being above average height, and Morag wears glasses – all, incidentally, traits that reinforce their connection to tall, brunette, bespectacled Laurence as well as to each other. Their family backgrounds are different – Vanessa comes from her paternal grandmother's 'old money' and her maternal grandfather's 'self-made' sufficiency, and despite the downturn in the family fortunes during the depression, she remains respectably middle class, whilst Morag is orphaned in infancy and raised on the impoverished social outskirts of Manawaka by the town 'scavenger' Christie. But the sense of dubious heritage is strong in both texts. Vanessa must ultimately reconcile herself to her psychological inheritance and her connection with her Grandfather, whilst Morag comes to claim Christie as her father, despite her years of feeling ashamed of him.

This chapter will begin with a detailed exploration of the protagonists' family circumstances, and their different degrees of marginalisation – both in terms of the family position within the community, and the protagonists' position within the family itself. The next section will address their early education and their relationships with their peers, as it is frequently through her experiences of school and their first friendships that the protagonist of a *Künstlerroman* first begins to understand herself as having different ambitions and abilities from her contemporaries. It is essential for her development that these ambitions are recognised, and the next section will consider the roles played by mentor figures within the texts, and the importance of the dynamics that come into play depending on the gender of the mentor. Finally, this chapter will evaluate the earliest



demonstrations of the protagonists' creative talents – be that juvenile poetry, forays in performance, or the occasional flash of precocious brilliance – and consider how these initial experiments lay the foundations for their later careers, as well as providing the starting point for the account of artistic development that is such a vital strand of the *Künstlerroman* narrative pattern.

### Family Circumstances and Marginalisation

If Emily Byrd Starr is arguably the most obviously archetypal *Künstlerroman* protagonist considered in this study, then this is best demonstrated when considering her childhood and her relationship with her intimidating family. The trilogy is, as Elizabeth Epperly has phrased it 'a struggle for voice',<sup>9</sup> but it is also a struggle for *family*, a struggle acknowledged by Kate Lawson, who has suggested reading *Emily of New Moon* 'not so much in the context of her career as a writer as in the context of Emily's psychological development into adult womanhood'.<sup>10</sup> However, I would posit that these two narratives are intrinsically co-dependent, and that charting how Emily endeavours to find her place in the daunting matriarchy of *New Moon*, as well as considering her early development as a writer, is the best way to generate a fuller understanding of Montgomery's insights into the social and creative difficulties that the artistically ambitious woman must face, even from childhood. After all, to focus on only one aspect at a time is not only to neglect half of the text's potential, but also fall into precisely the same pattern of restricted thinking that would deny Emily can successfully grow up to be both a woman and a writer.

While Emily's father is alive, he encourages her talent as actively as he can, although he readily admits his own failures, both as a writer and as a provider: 'You have

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<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass: L.M. Montgomery's Heroines and the Pursuit of Romance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p149.

<sup>10</sup> Kate Lawson, 'Adolescence and the Trauma of Maternal Inheritance in L.M. Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon*', *Canadian Children's Literature*, 25:2 (1999), p23 (pp21-41).

my gift – along with something I never had. You will succeed where I failed, Emily’.<sup>11</sup> After his death, she is stranded, and must leave the familiarity of home for a new life among strangers. The Murrays are a formidable family, and very proud of their traditions. Inheritance is a driving theme in the texts, and Emily initially struggles to come to terms with it. She is deeply uncomfortable at being reduced to the sum of her parts by her relatives, who are keen to dissect her appearance and allocate her nose to her Byrd grandfather, her forehead to her Starr father, and her eyelashes to her Murray mother, Juliet. Emily initially protests against this, saying that ‘You make me feel as if I was made up of scraps and patches’,<sup>12</sup> but as she grows more appreciative of her ancestry, she also learns to relish that occasional ‘Murray look’ – an expression, seemingly inherited from her grandfather, that is of such sternness even Aunt Elizabeth is silenced by it.

This repeated conflict between resistance and confirmation has obvious implications when considering the power and gender dynamics at work in Emily’s new home. It is immediately clear that Aunt Elizabeth is the ‘boss of New Moon’,<sup>13</sup> and in that role she is domineering and exercises absolute control. Yet she is also the most powerful advocate of traditional gender roles, determined to make Emily into a demure and obedient little girl: ‘The Murray women have never been under any necessity for earning their own living. All we require of you is to be a good and contented child and conduct yourself with becoming prudence and modesty.’<sup>14</sup> Nor is Aunt Elizabeth presented as unique – Aunt Ruth exercises a similarly aggressive power, as does Ellen Greene, and the schoolteacher Miss Brownell. These ‘domineering and latently menacing’ women may only possess a limited authority within the world at large, but in Emily’s world they are absolute.<sup>15</sup> And while the more sympathetic Aunt Laura does not share

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<sup>11</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p12.

<sup>12</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p26.

<sup>13</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p22.

<sup>14</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p59.

<sup>15</sup> Lawson, ‘Adolescence and the Trauma’, p25.

this power, she respects it, and accepts its boundaries of behaviour. She is surreptitiously kind to Emily, but cannot understand her transgressions, especially her writing: 'I thought she would be overjoyed to find she had a niece who could write poetry but she took it very coolly and said it didn't sound much like poetry'.<sup>16</sup> Although Aunt Laura may have a point about Emily's early doggerel, this initial lack of encouragement from her Aunts places the young Emily in an isolated position within the female family tradition.

The use of female power and control in *Emily of New Moon* has understandably attracted critical attention. Mary Henley Rubio suggests that Montgomery casts Aunt Elizabeth as 'the authoritarian mannish type who mimics the male prerogative to rule',<sup>17</sup> and thus serves to subvert patriarchal authority by making a pastiche of it. Epperly furthers this interpretation, and suggests that in her presentation of female authority, Montgomery exposes patriarchal order through challenge and recognition, 'making behaviour and attitudes that would have been acceptable in a man seem grotesque'.<sup>18</sup> These readings certainly cast a new light on the initial portrayal of Aunt Elizabeth, yet perhaps risk simplifying a character who develops into a complex and three-dimensional figure, possessed of 'an astonishing inner rage, a rage which complicates the figure of [her] as an image of female self-discipline and conformity'.<sup>19</sup> And they also risk overlooking the powerful themes of inheritance and family in the text: Emily struggles with, but eventually connects with her maternal heritage at New Moon, and finds herself to be part of the family – including Aunt Elizabeth.

The portrayal of the male characters in *Emily of New Moon* is equally problematic. While the women in Emily's life are, on the whole, strong, stubborn and (within limits) successful, they are counter-pointed by a series of weak, marginalized and damaged men.

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<sup>16</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p99.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Henley Rubio, 'Subverting the Trite: L.M. Montgomery's "room of her own"', *Canadian Children's Literature* 65:3 (1992) p24 (pp6-39).

<sup>18</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p7.

<sup>19</sup> Lawson, 'Adolescence and the Trauma', p28.

Emily's father, Douglass, is the first in this sequence. He has failed in his profession, and wastes away from consumption – a death more traditionally associated with female characters in literature.<sup>20</sup> As Lawson has it, he is 'like so many of the men who are to follow in Emily's life, a failure at everything except loving her'.<sup>21</sup> Her father is followed in this pattern by Cousin Jimmy, who treats Emily with ice cream and doughnuts, whilst also encouraging her talent in providing her with 'Jimmy books': 'he nourishes Emily as both a poet and as the girl whom he loves'.<sup>22</sup> Yet, irreparably damaged by Elizabeth's rage, he is considered 'simple', has his money controlled by Elizabeth, and while he gives Emily the means to record her poetry, is unable to do the same for himself. But whatever the shortcomings of Douglass and Jimmy as men, there is no question of their genuine love for Emily, or their support of her ambitions. The memory of one and the presence of the other help ease Emily's transition to life at New Moon, and she develops a bond to her home that will be a driving theme throughout the trilogy.

This theme of family has a less ancestral and more everyday presence when turning to the next protagonist to consider, Munro's Del Jordan, who has a special claim to being unique within the study. Like Catherine Morland of *Northanger Abbey*, whose mother 'instead of dying in bringing [Catherine] into the world, as any body might expect, still lived on'<sup>23</sup>, Del makes it through her entire childhood with both parents still alive and well. And while Munro is less pointed than Austen in satirising the scarcity of such good health in literature, the implication is clear, and signals a similar rejection of romantic tropes throughout the family narrative. By keeping Del's parents on this mortal coil, Munro instantly establishes that this is a more realistic treatment of the *Künstlerroman*. Including Del's parents also permits a more prosaic treatment of family

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<sup>20</sup> Examples include Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, Beth in *Little Women*, Ruby in *Anne of the Island*, and Dora in *David Copperfield*.

<sup>21</sup> Lawson, 'Adolescence and the Trauma', p26. An obvious exception to this rule being Dean, whose love for Emily is too destructive to count as a 'success'.

<sup>22</sup> Lawson, 'Adolescence and the Trauma', p27.

<sup>23</sup> Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) p5.

relationships, for while the loss of a parent is a source of loneliness, longing and trauma, their presence is frequently a source of frustration and petty family squabbles. This is especially true of Del's relationship with her mother, Addie, which is crucial to the collection, and grows increasingly strained throughout it. From a very early age, Del is aware that her mother is 'different'. While Del grows to consider herself as 'a spy'<sup>24</sup> in her community, Addie lacks this sense of subterfuge, and refuses to conceal her strange brand of tradition and unconventionality: 'she promoted education and the rights of women and opposed compulsory religious education in the school',<sup>25</sup> but she has difficulty putting her principles into practice. This is something Del perceives with a cruel degree of clarity: 'She could not bear drunkenness, no, and she could not bear sexual looseness, dirty language, haphazard lives [...] and so she had to exclude the Flats Road people from the really oppressed and deprived people, the real poor whom she still loved.'<sup>26</sup> She is an intelligent, frustrated woman, who defied her father to earn herself an education, but can find no real use for it beyond marriage. The story of Addie's education is told to Del in the manner of a catechism, but the perceptive Del is concerned by how it concludes, and unnerved by the lack of a 'Happy Ending':

In the beginning of her story was dark captivity, suffering, then daring and defiance and escape. Struggle, disappointment, more struggle, godmothers and villains. Now I expected as in all momentous satisfying stories – the burst of Glory, the Reward. Marriage to my father? I hoped this was it. I wished she would leave me in no doubt.<sup>27</sup>

This doubt perhaps springs from the family living arrangements. Del's parents spend the majority of the year living apart, and Del's life becomes divided between her mother's domain in Jubilee and her father's farm on the Flats Road, where he and her brother

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<sup>24</sup> Alice Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women* (London: Penguin, 1971) p141.

<sup>25</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p80.

<sup>26</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p8.

<sup>27</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p78.

Owen share a connected kinship that excludes and differentiates Del: 'they were happy as they were, my father and Owen [...] My father treated me politely, he praised my house cleaning, but he never joked with me as he would with girls who lived on the Flats Road'.<sup>28</sup> Although the openness of the narrative is an invitation to question what Del accepts, and to ask why she is so tolerant of her father, within her worldview he seems almost immune to her scrutiny. She does not challenge his decisions, or rebel against his beliefs, or judge his conduct. These privileges are reserved for her mother. Munro repeatedly establishes that Addie is not an inspiring, or trail-blazing role model for Del. Instead, their mother-daughter relationship is portrayed with a complex intensity that suggests Del's father is marginalized from the narrative simply because the struggle between his wife and daughter is too intimate to permit a third party.

Del deliberately and repeatedly differentiates herself from Addie; in 'The Age of Faith' she goes through a period of religious fervour that is prompted by the urge to rebel against her agnostic mother. When Addie challenges her, Del can dismiss her simply on the grounds of maternity: 'I was not discouraged by my mother's arguments, not so much as I would have been if they had come from someone else'.<sup>29</sup> Still, by the end of the story, Del has reached a similar theological position to Addie's, and is horrified by the faith she has managed to install in her younger brother. Del's reaction to Owen's desperate prayers is as incredulous and horrified as Addie's reaction to Del's: 'Seeing somebody have faith, close up, is no easier than seeing someone chop a finger off'.<sup>30</sup> It becomes apparent that in some matters, Del cannot help but agree with Addie.

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<sup>28</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p226-227. Del does not wonder what exactly her father finds to joke about with these girls, but it seems clear that he considers it an inappropriate subject for his own daughter, an omission that reinforces the sense of divide between Del and her community.

<sup>29</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p106.

<sup>30</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p114.

Beverly J. Rasporich considers that Addie is in fact the 'major influence' on Del's life, not denying the fact that 'she [Del] is inspired by her despite herself'.<sup>31</sup>

In *Who Do You Think You Are?*, Munro re-engages with the more 'classic' *Künstlerroman* pattern, creating a far more symbolic and consciously literary text. *Lives of Girls and Women*, with its wry realism, has been read by Coral Ann Howells as a fusion of form and content: 'the answers [to what Del will achieve] are already written into the text we have just finished reading'.<sup>32</sup> In other words, the text is representative of Del's eventual career, and of the style of writer she becomes – a proposition that will be interrogated later in this study, when evaluating just how Del is presented as a potential writer. For now, this notion is especially interesting when also applied to *Who Do You Think You Are?*, where the third-person narrative immediately distances the reader from the interior 'truth' of the protagonist, and the fairy-tale sensibilities of the narrative lend a theatrical, Gothic tone to the proceedings.<sup>33</sup> This seems clearly related to the decision to make Rose a developing actress rather than a potential author; her character is defined by performing rather than narrating, by inhabiting other roles rather than displaying her self. And the first role allocated to Rose is that of the oppressed child, presented in conflict with her stepmother, Flo. The relationship of stepmother to stepdaughter is instantly recognisable as one of the classic fairytale staples, and the title of the first story highlights this link. 'Royal Beatings' reminds the reader that most fairytales are about the social elite; the suggestion of royalty, of princesses and kings, stands in ironic counterpoint to the working-class social reality that also informs Munro's narrative. As a story, 'Royal Beatings' offers a quick introduction to the dynamics of Rose's early family life. In traditional fairytales, the benign husbands of wicked stepmothers tend to remain

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<sup>31</sup> Beverly J. Rasporich, *Dance of the Sexes: Art and Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1990), p46.

<sup>32</sup> Coral Ann Howells, *Alice Munro: Contemporary World Writers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p50.

<sup>33</sup> For more on this, see p277-278.

conveniently ignorant of their new wives' violent proclivities. In Munro's re-telling, this convention is instantly subverted. Rose may not be a princess, but her father is 'king of the royal beatings'<sup>34</sup>, and makes his first physical appearance in the text in this guise: 'Her father is after her, cracking the belt at her when he can, then abandoning it and using his hands. Bang over the ear, then bang over the other ear. Back and forth, her head ringing. Bang in her face. Up against the wall and bang in her face again.'<sup>35</sup> The blunt delivery reflects the brutality of the scene – it is exceptionally disturbing, especially considering the role of Flo. Her complicity in provoking these beatings complicates the reading of the conflict. This has less to do with Rose and her father than it has to do with Rose and Flo. He may be the physical manifestation of violence in the text, but he is also strangely peripheral to the narrative – this is emphasised by Munro 'killing him off' before he has actually appeared – his death is noted in a brief aside, two pages into the story. In *Who Do You Think You Are?* (and indeed, in many of the narratives) it is the matrilineal that is prioritised – even if, in the case of Rose and Flo, the inheritance is not actually biological.

Not only does the abrupt death of Rose's father negate his character, it also establishes Rose as an orphan-in-waiting, and plays into the iconography of the orphan figure in both *Künstlerroman* and fairy-tale narratives. Yet Munro does not use this device conventionally. Rather than mourning or idealising her lost parents, Rose has an ambivalent attitude towards them. As Del is reluctant to admit she has things in common with Addie, Rose finds it difficult to acknowledge her father's frustrated intelligence. After his death, Flo finds some scraps of his writing and asks for Rose's help in translating them: 'She showed the paper to Rose and asked, did she know what Spinoza was? Rose did know, or had an idea – she was in her teens by that time – but she replied that she did not. She had reached an age where she thought she could not stand to know

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<sup>34</sup> Alice Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1978), p3.

<sup>35</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p19.



any more, about her father.<sup>36</sup> Instead, the dominant relationship, at least for the early part of the narrative, is firmly established as that of Rose and Flo. Rose may inherit her father's intelligence, but her gift for performance is surely influenced by Flo. As E.D. Blodgett has characterised it, 'both are superb mimics, but Flo's tendency is towards the satirical, while Rose is more subtle, more apt to assume the reality of the part she plays'.<sup>37</sup> This is demonstrated through the dominant mode of communication between them: stories. 'Royal Beatings', 'Privilege' and 'Half a Grapefruit' are stories compiled of stories, and narrated through their telling: 'This is the sort of story Rose brought home',<sup>38</sup> 'Here is the sort of story Flo told Rose'.<sup>39</sup> The women are temporarily united by their shared sense of curiosity in these stories of scandal and history. They become conspirators, and the men of the house, Rose's father and her half-brother Brian, are excluded from the narrative: 'Flo telling a story – and this was not the only one, or even the most lurid one, she knew – would incline her head and let her face go soft and thoughtful, tantalizing, warning. 'I shouldn't even be telling you this stuff'.<sup>40</sup>

These stories function on at least two levels. Primarily, they introduce a certain immediacy to the text. They locate Flo and Rose in a tradition of verbal story-telling that is inherently female: 'Storytelling itself is interpreted as a female talent – women telling stories to other women, in particular to their daughters, is a constant motif'.<sup>41</sup> This sense of complicity between women conveys the intimacy of narration, but it also suggests a performance. And it is this sense of performance that furthers the significance of storytelling in the text, for this is one of the first ways that Rose's eventual career as an actress manifests itself within the narrative. The telling of these stories establishes her creative identity just as decisively as Emily's writing establishes hers. Rose's family

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<sup>36</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p51.

<sup>37</sup> E.D. Blodgett, *Alice Munro* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1985), p87.

<sup>38</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p43.

<sup>39</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p44.

<sup>40</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p9.

<sup>41</sup> Rasporich, *Dance of the Sexes*, p93.

circumstances are her first source of material, as well as the location of her first performances.

The family dynamic portrayed in *Who Do You Think You Are?* is essentially a duologue between two women. In the next text considered here, Laurence's *A Bird in the House*, we are instead dealing with a family dynamic that consists of a male monologue. Vanessa's early life is defined by her relationships with her family, especially her domineering maternal grandfather, Timothy Connor. Grandfather Connor is the archetypal pioneer patriarch, who controls his family as he controls himself, with iron will and discipline. His wife complements him in presenting the idealised epitome of all that is suitably feminine: self-sacrificing, self-effacing, gentle, with a certain naïve practicality that seems peculiar to this generation of females – sheltered from the facts of life, but not the consequences. The abiding insularity of the family is a striking feature of *A Bird in the House*; circumstances and inclination conspire to keep the family narrative paramount. One explanation for this is the sequence of bereavements that shape the narrative. Vanessa's childhood is formed by loss, or the fear of loss, and the early awareness of grief. When she fears for her mother's safety in childbirth, she receives little conventional comfort. Her Grandmother MacLeod's version of reassurance is to draw on the death of Vanessa's uncle in World War I: 'When your Uncle Roderick got killed' she said, 'I thought I would die. But I didn't die, Vanessa'.<sup>42</sup> This brittle stoicism is presented as the acceptable response: 'What happens is God's will. The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away'.<sup>43</sup> In this event, Vanessa's mother and brother survive, but there is something deeply disturbing about the constant threat of mortality that shadows the text. The concept of survival that stalks Canadian literature is in this text granted an unusually strong degree of narrative presence.

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<sup>42</sup> Margaret Laurence, *A Bird in the House* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985), p37.

<sup>43</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p37.

The first actual bereavement is the death of Grandmother Connor. Vanessa is a little too young to understand the loss: 'I did not fully realise yet that Grandmother Connor would never move around this house again, preserving its uncertain peace',<sup>44</sup> but she is perceptive enough to soak up all the secrets that are uncovered in the wake of the funeral. The complexities and confidences of the adult world become part of her initiation into it, the simultaneous lack and presence of belonging is reflected in her appreciation of 'the numerous fractured bones in the family skeleton'.<sup>45</sup> The second entry into the catalogue of loss is far more devastating, when Vanessa's father dies of pneumonia. Forced into an awkward type of maturity, Vanessa's own grief is made secondary: 'I stayed close beside my mother, and this was only partly for my own consoling. I also had the feeling that she needed my protection. I did not know from what, nor what I could possibly do, but something held me there'.<sup>46</sup> The psychological and physical consequences of this loss increase the sense of familial insularity. Vanessa retreats into herself, and the MacLeod family unit retreats into the Connors: Grandmother MacLeod moves away to live with her daughter, while Vanessa, her mother, and her brother Roddie move into the brick house with Grandfather Connor and Edna. The last story in the collection, 'Jericho's Brick Battlements', completes the cycle of mortality with the deaths of Grandfather Connor, his brother Dan, and Vanessa's mother. Chronologically, these come over a period of years, but the narrative places them in a suffocating proximity, severing Vanessa's ties to Manawaka in one fell swoop, whilst also forcing her to admit the significance of its influence in shaping her formative life. The effect of so many significant bereavements upon Vanessa is clearly a crucial aspect of her development as a character, and in his sensitive reading of *A Bird in the House* Christian Riegel suggests that her losses are intrinsically tied to her creativity –

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<sup>44</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p68.

<sup>45</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p69.

<sup>46</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p91.

that, if this is a *Künstlerroman*, it is one that is inspired by grief. Riegel bases this interpretation on Freudian theories of mourning as *Trauerarbeit* – grief work – as a process the bereaved must endure in order to recover their sense of self: ‘When the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again’.<sup>47</sup> Riegel posits that Vanessa must come to terms with her bereavements by learning the work of mourning and that for her, this work is the creative process of shaping her memories into a coherent narrative structure. He suggests that *A Bird in the House* is ‘a narrative about how an individual learns to mourn by seeing others mourn’,<sup>48</sup> and that Vanessa’s observations fuel her understanding, until she reaches the point of acceptance where ‘through creative means she is able to mourn the losses of her life effectively’.<sup>49</sup> This is an insightful interpretation of Vanessa’s characterisation, but it is dependent upon reading *A Bird in the House* as the ultimate ‘work’ of Vanessa, promoting her from narrative persona to ‘author’. Riegel is not alone in this reading; for example, Lucking refers to the text as ‘coming as it does from Vanessa’s pen’.<sup>50</sup> However, I have some reservations about the validity of this position. *A Bird in the House* has been considered in detail in this chapter because it has many characteristics of a *Künstlerroman*, but it does not necessarily fulfil all the requirements of one, as will become apparent in Chapter Three.

Still, Riegel’s reading has some striking implications for the other texts within this study. For example, the letters Emily writes to her dead father seem a classic enactment of Riegel’s argument that mourning prompts creative action: writing to her father helps her to work through her bereavement, and the imagined connection sustains and inspires her. Certainly, we can read loss and bereavement as motivating forces for all the protagonists except Del, and Laurence utilises them again in her portrayal of Morag

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<sup>47</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia* (London: Penguin, 2005), p245.

<sup>48</sup> Christian Riegel, ‘Rest Beyond the River: Mourning in *A Bird in the House*’ C. Riegel (Ed.) *The Writing of Margaret Laurence: Challenging Territory* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1997), p72 (pp67-80).

<sup>49</sup> Riegel, ‘Rest Beyond the River’, p79.

<sup>50</sup> David Lucking, *Ancestors and Gods: Margaret Laurence and the Dialectics of Identity* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002) p161.

Gunn in *The Diviners*. Morag is orphaned exceptionally early, losing both parents to infantile paralysis when she is five years old. The fascination with memory that characterises Morag's life as well as her fiction first manifests itself in an effort to recall her parents. She invents narratives of happy family life to accompany her few photographs of them – the 'snapshots' that console her for her lack of actual recall: '*All this is crazy, of course, and quite untrue. Or maybe true and maybe not. I am remembering myself composing this interpretation*'.<sup>51</sup> Morag struggles with both memory and forgetfulness in relation to her parents, trying to accept her imagined recollections and filtering them through her mentality of authorship, to somehow demonstrate her loyalty to two people she never knew: '*Why should it grieve me now? Why do I want them back? What could my mother and I say to one another? I'm more than ten years older now than she was when she died – and she would seem so young to me, so inexperienced*'.<sup>52</sup> With no relatives to care for her, Morag is sent to live with her father's army buddy, Christie Logan, and his wife Prin (Princess). Christie is the town 'scavenger', who collects the town's rubbish and takes it to the dump – the 'nuisance grounds'. Laurence's characterisation of the scrawny, erratic Christie and the ponderous, obese Prin verges – but does not quite stray into – the grotesque. One of Morag's earliest 'memorybank movies' conjures up her first impressions of them with a child's unwitting cruelty of observation: 'The Big Fat Woman sighs. She is so fat – can she be a person? Can *people* look like that? The Skinny man looks funny, too. Sort of crooked in his arms or legs, or like that. He has a funny lump in his throat and it wobbles up and down when he talks'.<sup>53</sup> They have the potential to be two-dimensional, comic creations but Laurence instead imbues them with an essential seriousness. They are bizarre figures, but they are not caricatured. After all, the consequences of their strangeness are never comical for Morag. She loves them, and is also deeply ashamed of

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<sup>51</sup> Margaret Laurence, *The Diviners* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1982) p8. Italics in original

<sup>52</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p11. Italics in original.

<sup>53</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p29. Italics in original.

them. They are outcasts, rejected and mocked by the Manawaka community, and Morag is often resentfully aware that, as their ward, she shares their fate. In a telling episode, that exemplifies the two levels of marginalisation at work in the text, Morag is sent to the town bakery by Prin, and overhears some typically spiteful gossip:

‘It’s a wonder some people can afford jelly dough-nuts’. Mrs McVitie.

‘Haven’t you ever noticed, though, that it’s *those* who spend their money as though it was water?’ Mrs. Cameron.

‘Poor child, don’t they ever have her hair cut?’ Mrs. McVitie.<sup>54</sup>

Morag repeats the conversation in a fit of pique, then is torn between blaming Prin (‘Why doesn’t Prin go and get her own goddamn blistering bloody shitty jelly doughnuts?’<sup>55</sup>) and blaming herself for mentioning it. She is still very much a child, who ends up crying in Prin’s lap, but she is increasingly characterised by the desire to protect her guardians from the opinions of others. In allying herself with them, she is alienated from the community; but in her awareness of the community, she is alienated from Christie and Prin.

But despite this estrangement, Morag is also genuinely fond of Christie and Prin. Christie in particular is crucial in facilitating Morag’s development into a writer. It is Christie who gives Morag the significance of her name as a gift, telling her vivid, wine-fuelled tales of Piper Gunn, a mythological Scotsman who led the clans to Canada. He even incorporates Morag herself into this private folklore, telling her that ‘Piper Gunn had a woman, and a strapping strong woman she was, with the courage of a falcon and the beauty of a deer and the warmth of a home [...] Her name, it was Morag’.<sup>56</sup> Nora Foster Stovel argues that this is Christie’s way of ‘giving Morag not just a home, but a

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<sup>54</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p43. Italics in original

<sup>55</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p43.

<sup>56</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p51.

history [...] and not just a history but a *herstory*<sup>57</sup>, providing the orphaned child with a sense of her own importance in legend.<sup>58</sup> This is something Morag finally acknowledges when he is dying - 'Christie, but you've been my father to me'<sup>59</sup> – the use of 'my' rather than 'a' seems especially significant. 'A' suggests a father-figure, whereas 'my' signals Morag's recognition of Christie as her true family. However, this is a moment from Morag's adult life, and her feelings in childhood are less resolved. And this is a condition shared across the texts. When considering the family circumstances of the five protagonists, certain common factors are immediately evident: an emphasis on maternal heritage, a double sense of isolation – both as an individual within the family and as a family within a community – and despite this, a fierce, defensive sense of pride and affection. Atwood has written that: 'If in England the family is a mansion you live in, and if in America it's a skin you shed, then in Canada it's a trap in which you're caught'.<sup>60</sup> Yet when considering the young female protagonists of these five Canadian *Künstlerroman* narratives, this formula breaks down. For, to differing degrees, they are all too self-sufficient to shelter in the mansion house of their family security, too aware of their ancestral connections to abandon them like dead skin – and most importantly, too resourceful to remain trapped.

### Early Education and Friendships

As essential to the progression of the *Künstlerroman* as family circumstances are, the protagonist must inevitably move beyond the family circle, and find her place amongst her peers. Experiences of early education and the formation of friendships are thus a

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<sup>57</sup> Stovel, p108. Italics in original

<sup>58</sup> There could potentially be objections to Christie's construction of a family myth for Morag as being too patriarchal, but I feel that Christie's exclusion from conventional masculinity (For more on this, see p262-263) means that this is less about the dominance of a masculine narrative than it is about a lonely child being provided with comfort and confidence.

<sup>59</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p396.

<sup>60</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Survival* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p131.

crucial stage within the narrative, as they present the protagonist with new challenges and opportunities for her development. And all the protagonists considered within this study are further united by an ambivalent relationship with formal education.

Therefore, it is fitting that Montgomery signals Emily's initiation into the minefield of school with an unusually blunt chapter heading: 'Trial by Fire'.<sup>61</sup> The first of Emily's 'trials' is sartorial. Clothing is a popular device for establishing difference, especially for young female characters, and just as Emily's physical appearance signifies her essential difference from her peers, so too do her garments.<sup>62</sup> She is shrouded in a drab and all-encompassing sleeved apron, testimony to Aunt Elizabeth's determination that Emily will be unfashionably modest, even at this pre-pubescent stage of her life. Interestingly, the apron originally belonged to Emily's disgraced mother – a relic of a chaste and biddable Juliet, prior to her marriage – and this reiterates Elizabeth's determination to preserve Emily at this docile stage of innocence. Emily's clothing also serves to remind her – and the other girls – of her social superiority: 'Emily had not wanted to put on the buttoned boots [...] But Aunt Elizabeth had told her that no child from New Moon had ever gone barefoot to school'.<sup>63</sup> Emily's first day gets off to a disastrous start. Both her (female) teacher and her classmates are provoked by her 'otherness', and she suffers accordingly when the girls join forces in tormenting her. And yet it is this experience that enables the taunted Emily to first declare herself a poet: "I can write poetry," said Emily, without in the least meaning to say it. But at that instant, she knew she *could* write poetry. And with this queer unreasonable conviction came – the flash! [...] The rapture and delight on Emily's face amazed and enraged her foes."<sup>64</sup> It is a moment of triumphant articulation for Emily, but its short-term value is limited – she

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<sup>61</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p76.

<sup>62</sup> Consider for example the difference between the fashionable Misses Brocklehurst and the drab uniform of the Lowood schoolgirls in *Jane Eyre*, or the way in which Sara Crewe's dresses reflect the fluctuations of her social position in *A Little Princess*.

<sup>63</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p79.

<sup>64</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p80. Italics in original.



may have managed to silence the other girls, but her more immediate concern is to find a friend among them.

A famous and much-commented on feature of Montgomery's *Anne* series is the intense and sentimental friendship she portrays between Anne and Diana.<sup>65</sup> The two girls form an instant connection, which they articulate in flowery and passionately romantic language: 'Diana, wilt thou give me a lock of thy jet-black tresses in parting to treasure forever more?'.<sup>66</sup> Initially it seems that this schoolyard courtship will be repeated in the *Emily* books, when Emily becomes friends with the superficial and saccharine Rhoda Stuart: 'Rhoda loves me as much as I love her. We are both going to pray that we may live together all our lives and die the same day'.<sup>67</sup> But after Rhoda's betrayal exposes Emily to her true personality, she seems to lose the desire for this particular brand of friendship. Instead, she grows closer to the unconventional and rebellious Ilse Burnley, who scandalises the community with her feral behaviour, her ragged clothes, and her reputation for blasphemy: 'She always spells 'God' with a little 'g' in her dictation'.<sup>68</sup> This relationship is unsentimental, feisty, and frequently erupts into violent quarrels: 'You needn't suppose, you little puling, snivelling chit, that you are going to boss *me*, just because you live at New Moon,' shrieked Ilse, as an ultimatum, stamping her foot.'<sup>69</sup> Anne and Diana's friendship is intense, but it expands to include other girls, with boys kept firmly on the margins until the final chapters of *Anne of Green Gables*. In a further departure from this model, Montgomery has Ilse and Emily befriend Teddy Kent, and presents him, even in childhood, as a point of contention between the girls: "Ilse says

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<sup>65</sup> Although after the controversy in the national press that followed Laura Robinson's paper 'Bosom Friends: Lesbian Desire in L.M. Montgomery's *Anne* Books', which was presented to the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers in 2000, more direct terms than 'intense and sentimental' have become part of the discussion. For a full account of Robinson's paper and the ensuing melee, see Cecily Devereux, 'Anatomy of a 'National Icon': *Anne of Green Gables* and the 'Bosom Friends' Affair', Irene Gammel (Ed.) *Making Avonlea: L.M. Montgomery and Popular Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) p32-42.

<sup>66</sup> L.M. Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992) p192.

<sup>67</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p96.

<sup>68</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p85.

<sup>69</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p118. Italics in original.

Teddy ought to like her best because there is more fun in her than in me but that is not true'.<sup>70</sup> The group is completed by Perry Miller, although it is made clear that his lower social status complicates his inclusion. Perry is a tough and vigorously 'normal' boy who serves as a contrasting foil to the artistic Teddy. When Emily is mocked in school, Perry bombards her attackers with 'spit pills'; Teddy sketches their caricatures. Perry rescues Emily from a bull; Teddy needs Emily's help to stop his mother poisoning his puppy. And yet it is clear to which version of masculinity Emily is drawn: Perry is the first to propose to her, and repeats the offer at regular intervals, but it is Teddy who is clearly marked out as her future love interest. Even in childhood, there is an aesthetic appreciation between them: 'she had liked his looks. It had seemed that he liked hers, too'.<sup>71</sup> But despite this bond with Emily, Teddy seems under-drawn, a pallid counterpoint to Emily's vibrant and vivacious personality. And despite her network of friends, and the pleasure she takes in school once Mr. Carpenter has replaced Miss Brownell, Emily retains a certain detachment; she is quick to regret confiding in Ilse during a sleepover, 'I told her a lot a things I wished afterwards I hadn't. Secrets'.<sup>72</sup> This sense of Emily's restraint is not unrelated to her artistic ambition. At this stage of her life, she writes in isolation, and is still developing the confidence needed to display her talents – a confidence that her education, and her budding friendships, will ultimately prove instrumental in establishing.

In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Munro is similarly attuned to schoolyard politics, and these are treated in far more detail than schoolroom lessons. Interestingly though, the details we are given attest once more to the same themes of humiliation and difference. In 'Age of Faith', Munro portrays Del's inability to succeed in Household Science, and the anger this provokes in her teacher: 'Look at the filthy work, filthy work! I've heard

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<sup>70</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p126.

<sup>71</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p121.

<sup>72</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p212.

about you, you think you're so clever with your memory work (I was famous for memorizing poems fast) and here you take stitches my six-year-old would be ashamed of'.<sup>73</sup> The incident is striking on several levels. Del is judged for her inability to master a 'feminine' skill (sewing) and it is made clear to her that her abilities in other areas are no compensation. She is criticised for thinking she is clever – bad enough to be clever, but worse still to take pride in it. The whole episode seems to suggest the question Munro asked in the other collection in this study – *Who Do You Think You Are?* – and it is something Del is unable to answer.<sup>74</sup>

She is equally confused by her place in the social pecking order, delivering a comprehensive run down of where she fits in: not a popular Queen Bee like 'Majoury Coutts, whose father was a lawyer and a member of the Provincial Legislature, and Gwen Mundy, whose father was an undertaker and proprietor of a furniture store',<sup>75</sup> but neither an irredeemable reject like 'the Italian girl who never spoke [...] and a very frail, weepy albino boy [...] They passed from year to year, grade to grade, in a dreamy inviolate loneliness'.<sup>76</sup> Instead, Del feels that she inhabits the fluctuating ground between these extremes; she is one of 'the occasionally chosen, the ambitious and unsure'.<sup>77</sup> She may not be reconciled to this, but she is certainly not going to lose it. And nor is she in this position alone – she has her 'best friend' – Naomi. Del is wonderfully blunt about the nature of her alliance with Naomi. It is born out of proximity, and sustained through necessity: 'we knew too much about each other to ever stop being friends, now'.<sup>78</sup> Del is not transported by affection for Naomi in the sentimental way that Emily is for Rhoda, and this is certainly not the passionate, fiery type of friendship shared by Emily and Ilse – although there is a definite similarity between Del and Emily in terms of their shared

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<sup>73</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p101.

<sup>74</sup> Perhaps suggesting a further motivation for Munro's return to such a similar narrative premise.

<sup>75</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p122.

<sup>76</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p122.

<sup>77</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p122.

<sup>78</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p119.

restraint. Rather, Del is disarmingly level-headed about this new element in her life, weighing up the pros and cons with an incongruously methodical tone: 'I had not had a friend before. It interfered with freedom and made me deceitful in some ways, but it also extended and gave resonance to life. This shrieking and swearing and flinging into snowbanks was not something you could do alone.'<sup>79</sup> And yet in many ways, Naomi is the perfect foil for Del – an apparently worldly and confident girl, ready to declare herself an authority on all matters, social and sexual. She is a wealth of misinformation, repeating the pronouncements of her mother (a nurse) with varying degrees of accuracy, and making no distinction between the medical and the mythical. Del is not always credulous, but she is consistently curious, and hoards up what Naomi tells her: 'I had heard that babies born with cauls will turn out to be criminals, that men had copulated with sheep and produced little shriveled woolly [sic] creatures with human faces [...] that crazy women had injured themselves in obscene ways with coat hangers.'<sup>80</sup> In 'Changes and Ceremonies' Del and Naomi take part in the school operetta, which acts as a catalyst for their feelings about boys as the sexes are drawn together by the performance. The girls competitively share their first crushes, and the experience reveals another side to their friendship. For while Naomi remains the authority on sex ('Frank Wales can't get hard-ons yet because his voice hasn't changed'<sup>81</sup>) they articulate their emotions in exaggerated romantic phrases that have to have originated with Del: 'We developed a code [...] *Pang, oh, Pang* (for when we stood near them on the stage). *Fury, double Fury* (for when Dale McLaughlin talked to Alma Cody and snapped his fingers against her neck) and *Rapture* (for when he tickled Naomi under the arm).'<sup>82</sup> Their rivalry intensifies, and the end of the operetta is marked by open hostilities. Yet this antagonistic friendship endures, and will be looked at further in the

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<sup>79</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p119.

<sup>80</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p117.

<sup>81</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p132.

<sup>82</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p131. Italics in original.

next chapter, when the characters move up to High School, and begin to experiment with putting their shared interest in sex into practice.

In *Who Do You Think You Are?* Munro presents a much rougher and more brutal type of school – one cannot imagine the boys in Rose’s class auditioning for an operetta, not when they have the alternative entertainment of encouraging a classmate to rape his retarded sister in the Boys Toilet: ‘Big boys were around them, hollering encouragement, big girls were hovering behind, giggling. Rose was interested but not alarmed. An act performed on Franny had no general significance, no bearing on what could happen to anyone else. It was only further abuse.’<sup>83</sup> Rose stores up these experiences long before she is fully aware of what they mean, and unveils them later, to entertain her new acquaintances – ‘people who wished they’d been born poor, and hadn’t been’.<sup>84</sup> Again, issues of authorship are central, albeit manifest in conversation and monologue rather than literature, as Rose reinforces her identity by graphically recalling the horrors of the school outhouse in an Ontario winter, deliberately and even gratuitously disgusting her middle-class friends: ‘Snow piled up on the seat and on the floor. Many people, it seemed, declined to use the hole. In the heaped snow under a glaze of ice, where the snow had melted and frozen again, were turds copious or lonesome, preserved as if under glass.’<sup>85</sup> And yet at the same time, Rose is wary of her own narrative – she knows it is partly a performance. Ildikó de Papp Carrington calls attention to how the narrative voice framing Rose ‘functions like a drama critic in the audience of the real life plays in which Rose is constantly performing’.<sup>86</sup> Carrington’s choice of the phrase ‘real life’ is especially apt. Rose constantly seeks to find the ‘truth’ of events, and while the narrative

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<sup>83</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?* p36.

<sup>84</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p32.

<sup>85</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p25.

<sup>86</sup> Ildikó de Papp Carrington, *Controlling the Uncontrollable: the fictions of Alice Munro* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1989), p131.

has many carefully constructed Gothic overtones, Rose exaggerates, but she is shrewd enough to avoid romanticizing the actual events and characters she encounters.

When she recalls Franny's rape, it is neither sanitised nor salacious: 'Later on Rose would think of Franny when she came across the figure of an idiotic, saintly whore, in a book or a movie. Men who made books and movies seemed to have a fondness for this figure, though Rose noticed they would clean her up. They cheated.'<sup>87</sup> But while Rose has an ambivalent adult relationship to romanticizing her schooldays, she is active in creating a romance for herself as a child, and develops an intense passion for an older girl in the school. Munro can deploy a vocabulary unavailable to Montgomery, and one wonders if Montgomery, given the option, would concur that such a passion between young girls is: 'Sexual love, not yet sure exactly what it needed to concentrate on. [...] there was the incidental difference in the sex of the person chosen; otherwise it was the same thing, the same thing that has overtaken Rose since. The high tide; the indelible folly; the flash flood.'<sup>88</sup> The crush is eventually destroyed, but while Emily moves from her passion for Rhoda to a genuine friendship with Ilse, Rose finds no such contemporary in Hanratty. Instead, it becomes clear that Rose can only find real friends once she has expanded her horizons and left Hanratty behind.

I have already observed the unusual degree of familial insularity that characterises *A Bird in the House*, and there is precious little information to be gleaned about Vanessa's life beyond the Brick House – school and friends of her own age take second place, away from the central drama that is the family. Even when Vanessa is a teenager, she describes her friend Mavis only briefly, and in terms that contrive to undermine the actual idea of friendship ('we had often quarrelled and been rivals in every way'<sup>89</sup>). Her childhood is even more closed in. Strangely enough, the most information of Vanessa's early life away

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<sup>87</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p28.

<sup>88</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p44.

<sup>89</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p174.

from her family comes not from *A Bird in the House*, but from a passing snapshot in *The Diviners*. In *The Diviners*, Morag is anxious to be chosen to sing a solo in the choir, but the honour falls on Vanessa instead. Morag is jealous and ‘hopes that something really awful will happen to Vanessa. But it doesn’t. She sings a crappy song but she never misses a note’.<sup>90</sup> Later, when Vanessa’s father dies, Morag feels guilty, but is unable to say or do anything: ‘She [Vanessa] has never spoken to Morag much, anyway. Vanessa does not talk much to anyone, now, for quite a while. Morag watches. From a long way off.’<sup>91</sup> It is an image of isolation and detachment that seems entirely in keeping with Vanessa’s behaviour in *A Bird in the House* and reinforces the cyclical nature of the Manawaka texts, whilst preserving Vanessa’s self-imposed segregation from the community narrative.

Finally, when considering the treatment of early education and friendships, in *The Diviners*, Morag’s early experiences of school display her fascination with language – as well as her stubborn determination to command it. She is constantly questioning, ‘What means *Principal*? What is *Strap*?’,<sup>92</sup> but crucially, she never voices these questions. Not only does she refuse to admit weakness, but she wants to grapple with the words by herself. Jill Franks notes how Morag ‘embraces a world of linguistic and intellectual exploration early in life’<sup>93</sup> and of all Laurence’s protagonists, she is ‘the most in control of the parodies, puns and other verbal games that run through her head’.<sup>94</sup> She cannot resist exploring words, looking at them from all possible angles: ‘*A mooner*. That sounds nice. She knows what it means. It isn’t nice. It means somebody who moons around, dawdling and thinking. But to her it means something else. Some creature from another place, *another planet*.’<sup>95</sup> Again, it is important to emphasise the private nature of this wordplay.

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<sup>90</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p82.

<sup>91</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p83.

<sup>92</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p32. Italics in original

<sup>93</sup> Jill Franks, ‘Jesting Within: Voices of Irony and Parody as Expressions of Feminism’, Christian Riegel (Ed.) *The Writing of Margaret Laurence: Challenging Territory* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1997) p101 (pp99-118).

<sup>94</sup> Franks, ‘Jesting Within’, p101.

<sup>95</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p51. Italics in original

Morag is deeply suspicious of her classmates. Like Emily, her clothes mark her out from the first day as different and alien to the majority – although they are separated by several eras of fashion, Morag’s shapeless, floor-length dress is reminiscent of Emily’s apron – and no less unpopular with its wearer. But of course, while Emily’s clothes made her clearly out to be a proud and prestigious Murray, Morag’s outfit, sewn ‘out of a wraparound which Prin is now too stout to wear’<sup>96</sup> signals her poverty and her association with the ‘scavenger’. When even the teachers are overheard referring to ‘old Christie and that half-witted wife of his’,<sup>97</sup> the stigma this attaches to Morag cannot be underestimated. She is arguably the most marginalised of all the protagonists in this study, outcast by her connection to the conspicuous strangeness of Christie and Prin.

Her response is fierce. Morag becomes a veteran of playground battles, feared, if not respected: ‘Morag doesn’t care a fuck. They can’t hurt her. She’ll hurt them first’.<sup>98</sup> She attends school every day, learns as much as she can and never admits fear. She doesn’t have a friend as such. The closest equivalent to one would be Eva, who lives near Morag, and in similarly deprived circumstances. But Eva is weak and spineless and Morag’s protective care for her is tinged by contempt: ‘She loves Eva. She looks down on Eva, too, a bit, because Eva is as gutless as a cleaned whitefish’.<sup>99</sup> Eva’s helplessness is an unwelcome reminder that despite her cultivated fierceness, Morag too is essentially vulnerable. Her performance of toughness is just that – a performance – and Morag struggles between the desire to be befriended and known and the risks inherent in letting her guard down. However, she does recognise that she is not unique in the position and reluctantly perceives a potential ally in Jules ‘Skinner’ Tonnerre, her eventual lover and fellow outcast: ‘Maybe Skinner doesn’t notice the passed remarks? Maybe he just doesn’t

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<sup>96</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p31.

<sup>97</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p63.

<sup>98</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p62.

<sup>99</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p61.



let on. Like her. He is *not* like her. She does not glance in his direction again all day.<sup>100</sup>

While their actual contact with each other at this stage is negligible, the sense of recognition he inspires in her is crucial to the later narrative and their bond is forged by the shared experience of their formative years.

At this point it is worth taking time to offer a quick comparison in relation to some points raised by Linda Huf. In *Portrait of the Artist as A Young Woman*, Huf suggests that a typical feature of the female *Künstlerroman* is an element of ‘masculinity’ inherent in the protagonists’ personalities: ‘Artist heroines by women are athletic in build, skilled in sports, unshrinking in fights, able in mathematics’.<sup>101</sup> In fact, her reading posits that this type of characterisation is essentially universal, describing the protagonist of Sara Payson Willis’s *Ruth Hall* as ‘like all artist heroines [...] a strapping young woman, a girl with unusual gumption. She is a tomboy, of course’.<sup>102</sup> And yet this reading fails to illuminate these particular *Künstlerroman* narratives. The protagonists considered in this study are not ‘normal’ or ‘average’ girls – but this difference is never explained by recourse to the tired, pre-Butler, post-Blyton figure of the ‘tomboy’. Emily (surely the physical antithesis of ‘strapping’) might excel at maths and history as well as literature and Morag might scrap in the playground, but these traits are not described in terms of oppositional gendered identities. Rather, they are all incorporated together. The protagonists of these texts – even in early childhood – have to be understood as complicated, creative and comprehensively female. They are also frequently confused, misunderstood, uncertain and in need of understanding and guidance. And, as within the texts, such understanding is all too rare a commodity, it is invaluable when it arrives in the form of a mentor.

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<sup>100</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p69. Italics in original.

<sup>101</sup> Linda Huf, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1985), p4.

<sup>102</sup> Huf, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman*, p25.

## Mentors and Anti-Mentors

A further noteworthy element to the childhood phase of the *Künstlerroman* narrative is the significance of mentor figures in the protagonist's development. This is especially important in light of how frequently the protagonist has an unsympathetic or dysfunctional family background. The mentor figure therefore provides both personal and professional support, recognising the protagonist's potential and helping them towards achieving it. However, a quick survey of existing criticism reveals that this figure has not received the attention it would seem to merit. Neither Evy Varsamapoulou's *The Poetics of the Künstlerroman and the Aesthetics of the Sublime* nor Huf's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman* figure the mentor in their overall structural analysis.<sup>103</sup> This section aims to redress this balance by charting the deployment of the mentor figure as a definite narrative trope, and acknowledging the complications this poses when not all mentor figures exert a positive influence and not all protagonists are comfortable with the notion of nominating a role-model, or accepting advice.

Emily is strikingly rich in mentor figures, although some are inevitably more valuable than others. Their primary role is to help Emily declare and display her talent. Most critical studies of the *Emily* trilogy, from Epperly's book *The Fragrance of Sweet Grass* (1992) to Lawson's article 'Adolescence and the Trauma of Maternal Inheritance in L.M. Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon*' (1999), see Emily's path to acceptance as marked by pivotal encounters with patriarchal representatives and focus their readings on her meetings with the priest, Father Cassidy, the misanthropic Dean Priest and her mentor figure Mr. Carpenter. Epperly's and Lawson's readings both take Emily's meeting with Father Cassidy as the starting point of her journey towards declaring herself a writer. She

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<sup>103</sup> While they might, during analysis of individual texts, mention how a character functions as a guide or teacher – for example, Huf's analysis of Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark* (1915) establishes the importance of the 'true' mentor as a character without a sexual or romantic agenda towards the protagonist – the idea of the mentor figure being a frequently deployed narrative component to the *Künstlerroman* is never explicitly developed.

approaches Father Cassidy in an act of assertive bravery; she wishes him to intervene on her behalf in the family quarrel with Lofty John. He is a stereotypically whimsical Irishman, who is charmed by Emily's solemn sense of mission, and deeply amused by her 'epic'. His attitude to her working of 'One av the seven original plots in the world'<sup>104</sup> has led Epperly to read him as 'emblematic of knowing, tolerant, amused male authority as it indulges the young female's vivacious ignorance', and to describe the episode as 'a chilling chapter'.<sup>105</sup> He is certainly amused by Emily's epic, but surely the reader is too? Emily is a talented and ambitious child, not a genius, and a few chapters later she herself rejects 'The Child of the Sea' as 'not just the wonderful composition she had once deemed it'.<sup>106</sup> There is the need to distinguish between Father Cassidy's gentle mockery and his genuine appreciation of her potential, as Lawson does: '[he] takes account of her age, makes allowance for her immaturity, and still tells her to 'Keep on''.<sup>107</sup> And there is no denying that this fills Emily with confidence.

However, I would point out that Montgomery goes beyond simply providing Emily with valediction from male authority figures and also stresses the significance of the support and encouragement Emily receives from other female characters. The first person Emily fully reveals her desire to be a poet to is Ilse; the degree of inhibition she feels at sharing secrets is overcome by her desire for recognition. When Emily first befriends Ilse, she recites her latest creation, finding that 'somehow she did not mind letting Ilse hear'.<sup>108</sup> And she is rewarded by the first validation of her literary career: 'I guess you *are* a poetess all right'.<sup>109</sup> Then Montgomery introduces the character of Janet Royal, whose challenging impact on Emily's development is personal as well as professional. Janet is successful and solvent, but also unmarried and childless, and wryly

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<sup>104</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon* p199.

<sup>105</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet Grass*, p153.

<sup>106</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p282.

<sup>107</sup> Lawson, 'Adolescence and the Trauma', p26.

<sup>108</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p115.

<sup>109</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p115. Italics in original.

admits that her community considers her a failure: 'all they think is that I've played my cards badly, and lost the matrimonial game'.<sup>110</sup> She presents Emily with one possible version of her own future, an early indication of the difficulties ahead in reconciling career with social expectations. And in writing her novel *The Moral of the Rose*, Emily finally wins the support and approval of her sternest and most traditional relative, her Aunt Elizabeth. Elizabeth's reluctant conversion stresses both the quality of Emily's work, and her close family's gradual acceptance of it as part of her identity. The men in Emily's life may fuel her ambitions and her narrative is ultimately framed with heterosexual romance, but it is the female characters that enable her to define and understand herself as a woman and a writer.

Nevertheless, during her childhood, Emily is especially influenced by Dean and Mr. Carpenter – after all, she does not meet Janet Royal until the second volume of the trilogy, and she does not win over Elizabeth until the third. And so she is predominantly mentored by these two very different men. Dean makes a dramatic entry into her life when he rescues her from a cliff. He is a wonderful character, easily the darkest and most charismatic of Montgomery's male protagonists: a worldly, sophisticated cynic, tormented by his deformity and accompanying nickname 'Jarback'. Emily is fascinated by him, charmed by him, and eager for his opinion on her poetry: 'He had a right to the inner sanctuary and she yielded it unquestioningly'.<sup>111</sup> To the reader, equally fascinated and charmed, yet aware, as Emily is not, of what he means by that disturbing phrase 'I think I'll wait for you',<sup>112</sup> Emily's confidence appears both understandable and dangerously complete. While he listens attentively to her recital, his praise is equally charged with an alternative meaning: 'You're twelve, didn't you say? When you're ten

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<sup>110</sup> L.M. Montgomery, *Emily's Climb* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 312.

<sup>111</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p269.

<sup>112</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p268.

years older I shouldn't wonder – but let's not think of it'.<sup>113</sup> Dean is casting himself as the romantic hero of Emily's narrative, shifting the literary allusions back to *Jane Eyre*: 'he already identifies himself as the middle-aged Rochester, craggy, misanthropic, and Byronic, who yearns towards the purity and revitalizing youthful love of Jane Eyre'.<sup>114</sup> Emily is genuinely ignorant of his intentions, and strong-minded enough to reject his claims of ownership: 'Emily felt an odd sensation of rebellion. She didn't fancy the idea of belonging to anybody but herself'.<sup>115</sup> However, if Emily wins this skirmish, it is evidently only the beginning of this particular war, and she remains dangerously ignorant as to the compromised value of Dean's literary advice, and his position in the text as an anti-mentor to her developing career.

She has a more honest ally in her alcoholic schoolteacher, Mr. Carpenter, who although in many ways the next flawed man in that long line of failures (his addiction excludes him from success as comprehensively as her father's health, or her cousin's mental fragility), he is nevertheless deeply respected and admired by her as a judge of literature. His gruff manner is off-putting and his first response to Emily's ambition is to belittle her: 'Better stick to your needle and duster. Too many fools in the world trying to write poetry and failing'.<sup>116</sup> However, once he suspects Emily actually has potential, he is relentless in pushing her to fulfil it, having her work twice as hard for half the praise compared to the other, less talented students: 'Mr. Carpenter does not discriminate on the basis of gender, but on the basis of talent and excellence, saving his harshest criticism for that which he loves best: literature and Emily'.<sup>117</sup> Emily values his judgement implicitly and he is an increasingly important figure in her young life.

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<sup>113</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p270.

<sup>114</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p164.

<sup>115</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p271.

<sup>116</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p291.

<sup>117</sup> Lawson, 'Adolescence and the Trauma', p27.

In striking contrast to Emily, in *Lives of Girls and Women*, Del models herself *against* potential mentors, responding away from influences and examples she perceives as negative, rather than attempting to emulate them. This process may not fit the conventional understanding of mentor relationships, but even negative influences are notable. The most obvious ‘anti-mentor’ is Del’s Uncle Craig. He is a pompous amateur scholar, absorbed in compiling a local history and indulged in this occupation by his traditionally feminine sisters, Del’s aunts, Elspeth and Grace. Del recalls that: ‘When I read, years afterwards, about Natasha in *War and Peace*, and how she *ascribed immense importance, although she had no understanding of them, to her husband’s abstract, intellectual pursuits*, I had to think of Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace.’<sup>118</sup> Del is disillusioned by the version of feminine identity offered by her aunts and frustrated by their virtuous acceptance of their limited sphere of influence: ‘between men’s work and women’s work was the clearest line drawn, and [...] any suggestion of stepping over it, they would meet with such light, amazed, regretfully superior laughter’.<sup>119</sup> Crucially however, Del’s rejection of her aunts’ roles does not prompt her to emulate her uncle; she is not looking to have the autonomy of a man, but to have it as a woman. After Craig’s death, the aunts look to Del to finish his masterpiece:

‘Because we hope – we hope someday that you’ll be able to finish it.’

‘We used to think about giving it to Owen, because he’s the boy –

‘But you’re the one has the knack for writing compositions.’<sup>120</sup>

But Del is resolutely uninspired by this deadening accumulation of data, although she covets the fireproof tin box Craig has stored his papers in. In the first reference to herself as a writer, Del decides it would be ‘a good place to keep those few poems and

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<sup>118</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women* p32. Italics in original

<sup>119</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p32.

<sup>120</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p61.

bits of a novel I had written'<sup>121</sup> – which until now have been stored inside a copy of *Wuthering Heights*. Craig's papers are unceremoniously relegated to the cellar and destroyed by a flood.

It is not the first time that Del will reject the 'official' narrative that Craig's history represents. In 'Princess Ida', Del's difficult relationship with her mother takes centre stage, as Addie embarks on a career selling encyclopaedias. Addie expects Del to assist her, utilising her daughter's intelligence as a testimonial in her sales pitch: 'My own daughter has been reading these books and I am just amazed at what she has picked up'.<sup>122</sup> Initially, Del is enthusiastic – she has a thirst for reading and knowledge that is characteristic of the developing writer. But like most young girls she is also socially sensitive, embarrassed by her mother's unconventional lifestyle, and self-conscious about displaying her own intellect. To Addie's disappointment, Del soon refuses to perform and feigns ignorance rather than feel herself humiliated by these performances. Addie's own mother had a brief career in book distribution, giving out Bibles to the poor, and she too conscripted her daughter into helping out. Addie recalls her resentment that she spent her childhood 'tramping all over the country at the age of eight, in boy's shoes and not owning a pair of mittens, giving away Bibles'.<sup>123</sup> Neither Addie nor Del make an explicit link between this generational repetition, but Del grows increasingly frustrated with her mother's conception of learning, just as Addie was infuriated with her mother's religious fanaticism. The inferred meaning is that Addie's unquestioning faith in books carries its own brand of evangelical devotion, and despite, or possibly because of, her developing literary vocation, Del is at best an agnostic. Craig's history, Addie's encyclopaedias, her grandmother's Bibles – even Addie's 'Great Books discussion

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<sup>121</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p62.

<sup>122</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p65.

<sup>123</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p75.

group'<sup>124</sup> – all these iconic texts ultimately arouse little in Del but satire and suspicion. Through Del, Munro challenges 'texts that presume to be totality',<sup>125</sup> offering instead a view of literature that is incomplete, culpable and subjective. With such a view in mind, it is then perhaps not surprising that Del is so strongly influenced by negative rather than positive forces.

In *Who Do You Think You Are?* Rose is also ambivalent about mentor figures, although this can only be demonstrated by going beyond the borders of this chapter and considering an example from her student days rather than her early childhood. Still, it is worth quickly assessing as part of the wider theme. At this point in her life, Rose is on a scholarship at university, working part-time at the library to help pay her way and living with Dr. Henshawe, a genteel academic. She is struggling to decide what direction her future will take - out of her depth, self-conscious about her working class background and nervously attempting to negotiate the double standards applied to female identity: 'Poverty in girls is not attractive unless combined with sweet sluttish-ness, stupidity. Braininess is not attractive unless combined with some signs of elegance; *class*'.<sup>126</sup> Dr. Henshawe has her own ideas about this, which she is eager to impose, but Rose is resistant. Previous scholarship students have graduated into acceptably decorous and feminine roles: 'Most of them had got to be teachers, then mothers. One was a dietician, two were librarians, one was a professor of English'.<sup>127</sup> Rose is increasingly uncomfortable with their living arrangement, as she resists Dr. Henshawe's well intentioned attempts to guide her future career: 'Dr. Henshawe would say, 'Well you are a scholar, you are not interested in that.' Usually she was speaking of some event at the college; a pep rally, a football game, a dance. And usually she was right; Rose was not

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<sup>124</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p72.

<sup>125</sup> Magdalene Redekop, *Mothers and Other Clowns: The Stories of Alice Munro*, (London: Routledge, 1992) p82.

<sup>126</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p74. Italics in original.

<sup>127</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p72.



interested. But she was not eager to admit it.<sup>128</sup> The idea of a mentor will only function if the protagonist wishes to be the 'mentee', and Rose is stubborn in this respect. Her refusal strikes a chord with Del's, and reinforces the idea that in Munro's version of the *Künstlerroman*, those claiming to be mentors are to be viewed with suspicion.

*A Bird in the House* takes a much more innocent approach; the young Vanessa admires her Aunt Edna to the point of hero-worship. Edna is an attractive character who has returned to Manawaka from Winnipeg, having lost her job in the Depression. She has a wise-cracking persona, smokes forbidden cigarettes in her bedroom and, bizarrely like a Canadian prototype for Tracy Emin and her tent, Edna embroiders her boyfriends' names onto her pyjama bag. Vanessa takes Edna as her first and favourite model of womanhood, playing with her cosmetics and perfume, feeling a possessive jealousy of her boyfriends. Vanessa is more than happy to tell Edna about her latest writing efforts, confiding (or perhaps, more accurately, boasting) that 'I'm not doing any [poetry] right now. I'm writing a story. I've filled two scribblers already'.<sup>129</sup> However, this relationship is essentially personal rather than professional – Edna takes an interest in Vanessa's writing because she is an indulgent Aunt, not from the desire (or indeed the ability) to aid her progress and draw out her talent. And Vanessa's admiration is for the lipstick and the cigarettes rather than the stalled career. She is trying to view Edna as a romantic protagonist rather than an intellectual role model. As Vanessa grows older, the relationship shifts. She begins to see through the smart persona and appreciate her Aunt's unhappiness, and she becomes increasingly aware of the possibility that she will emulate her more than she ever aspired to. One of Grandfather Connor's many charming habits is to interrupt Edna's dates by using his rocking chair to create a racket throughout the house. This leads to the following exchange between Edna and Vanessa:

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<sup>128</sup>Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p92.

<sup>129</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House* p18.

'You know something, kiddo? The rocking chair business has gone on so long now that I hardly even find it embarrassing any more. Remember that, in a few years' time, eh?'

'Why?'

'Because,' Aunt Edna said, and although she was smiling, neither of us took it as a joke, 'it'll be your turn then.'<sup>130</sup>

It is, of course, a completely accurate prediction. Edna is, by this point in the text, a warning rather than a mentor, and her escape from the Brick House for marriage to an amiable man does not dispel the warning.

While Vanessa is absorbed in the personal rather than the professional, Morag in *The Diviners* is presented as actively seeking out someone to recognise her ability and support her ambitions. Her first attempt to gain recognition for her writing takes the form of poetry. She writes a poem about the Nativity and shows it to her Sunday school teacher. Mrs. McKee damns her with faint praise, but despite this initial setback, Morag pursues her ambitions, finally meeting with a degree of recognition and encouragement from another teacher, Miss Melrose: 'Morag worships her. Because of what she says about the compositions. Sometimes after class as well. No one ever before has talked to Morag about what was good and bad in writing, and shown her why. It is amazing.'<sup>131</sup> Laurence symbolically expands on the significance of this, by making Miss Melrose the first person to notice Morag is short-sighted and to push her into overcoming her cosmetic aversion to glasses: 'You need your eyes. In the last analysis, they're all you have'.<sup>132</sup> A connection is suggested between Morag's creative and optical vision, her new glasses and enhanced worldview physically representing her increasing sense of ambition. Miss Melrose has suggested Morag should submit her stories for publication in the

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<sup>130</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p163.

<sup>131</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners* p120.

<sup>132</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p123.

school paper and while she resists the idea, it nevertheless takes hold of her imagination. She has by now nearly completed high school and is ready to move on. The relationship with Miss Melrose does not survive this move; Emily continues to rely on Mr. Carpenter long after she has left his schoolroom, but Morag does not maintain more ties to Manawaka than she can help.<sup>133</sup>

In this progression away from her mentor, Morag not only demonstrates her independence; she also calls attention to a final purpose served by mentor figures in all the texts considered; they are there to be overtaken. That old and irksome saying ‘those who can’t do, teach’ is strikingly apt when considering the role of the mentor in the *Künstlerroman* narrative. Rather than being role-models who have already gained success in their creative field, the mentors in all the texts tend to have been compromised by circumstances, or to simply not have had the protagonists’ innate artistic abilities.<sup>134</sup> Mr. Carpenter was a promising scholar, but his alcoholism undermined and derailed his prospects. Del’s Uncle Craig not only dealt in a brand of writing that held no appeal for her, but he never actually completed it. Rose’s time with Dr. Henshawe teaches her more about what she does not want to become than offering an example. Vanessa increasingly perceives Edna’s unhappiness. And Morag, in her desire to escape Manawaka, can never wholeheartedly accept anyone as a role model if they have proven themselves either incapable or unwilling to do the same. While the mentor figures within these narratives can, by negative or positive example, show the protagonists to the start of that elusive ‘Alpine Path’, it is always a climb they will have to make alone. And with that in mind, this chapter turns to a consideration of how the presentation of their attempts and

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<sup>133</sup> This cutting of ties also comes to apply to the newspaper editor Lachlan MacLachlan, who employs Morag for a time at the *Manawaka Banner*. This period of her life falls out of the remit of childhood, but it is worth mentioning his bluff kindness towards Morag – he lends her books, and encourages her to learn more about art and culture – but he is also, like Mr. Carpenter in the *Emily* trilogy, a deeply troubled man, who has turned to alcohol after the death of his son and Morag is frequently presented as taking care of him rather than the other way around.

<sup>134</sup> Janet Royal in the *Emily* trilogy is an exception to this in some ways, being obviously successful and solvent, but her position as a mentor is never consolidated, as Emily ultimately rejects the opportunity to live and work with her in New York.

abilities in childhood is the truest forum in which to evaluate these narratives as *Künstlerromans* and these protagonists as developing artists.

### **Literary Beginnings and the Importance of Childhood to the *Künstlerroman***

A final component to consider in the childhood narrative strand of a *Künstlerroman* is the significance of the protagonists' literary beginnings – their first efforts and inspirations, the early steps of their progress towards a creative career. After all, it is arguable that the point of beginning the narrative in childhood is not just to provide an overview of the protagonists' early life and background, but to establish essentially what makes them a future artist; to show exactly *why* these girls are different.

Emily has a persistent fascination with the written word, and an intense relationship to literature. Like all writers, she is a voracious and critical reader, and books hold an irresistible attraction to her. But it is never a passive relationship – Emily reads to write, writes about her reading, and constantly imagines how she will describe events as they are actually happening. This makes for an increasingly multi-faceted narrative; as Epperly has it 'we are always reading Emily as though Emily is reading herself writing'.<sup>135</sup> This is both revealing and disingenuous; there are points when the intimacy of the narrative means that we feel completely included in Emily's creative process; and there are points when this sense of intimacy is misleading. At this stage, Emily's favoured mode of expression is in letters to her father, and while her early efforts at poetry are frequently referred to, it is the letters that 'represent the real opus of *Emily of New Moon*'.<sup>136</sup> The letters are a believable mix of character sketches, anecdotes, confidences and complaints, and include some eclectic reading lists where Emily establishes herself as a budding critic: 'Rueben and Grace, a story but not a novel, because Rueben and Grace

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<sup>135</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p151.

<sup>136</sup> Lorna Drew, 'The Emily Connection: Ann Radcliffe, L.M. Montgomery and 'The Female Gothic'', *Canadian Children's Literature* 77 (1995) p23 (pp19-32).

are brother and sister and there is no getting married. Little Katy and Jolly Jim, same as above but not so exciting and traggic [sic] Nature's Mighty Wonders [...] Alice in Wonderland.<sup>137</sup> Despite Elizabeth's veto of novels (and of Dr. Burnley's anatomy books), Emily nevertheless manages to find inspiration and entertainment from reading, which is reflected in her ambitious vocabulary, and romantic sensibility. But there is still a further dimension to the narrative of literature, which is found in considering the intertextual links Montgomery draws between her narrative and that of *Jane Eyre*.

The parallels between the two texts, which have been thoroughly catalogued in Epperly's 'The Struggle for Voice', are numerous: both Emily and Jane are orphans, living with difficult relatives, both have passionate tempers and ambitions to work for their living. But what is especially telling is the way in which Montgomery breaks from the pattern at the most obvious point of similarity. When Jane transgresses, she is locked in the terrifyingly Gothic 'red-room', where she proceeds to have paralysing hysterics and fall unconscious. But when Emily is similarly punished, she conquers her fear and escapes.<sup>138</sup> The influence of *Jane Eyre* later becomes especially relevant to Emily's relationship with Dean, and before that relationship grows too established, it is worth remembering that Montgomery uses Brontë's text as an inspiration, not a rule-book: Emily does not always have to do as Jane does. This at once associates Emily with a strong female literary tradition, and allows her to cast off the elements of it that would restrict her.

Throughout her childhood, Emily is thus clearly marked out as having a strong literary potential and at the end of *Emily of New Moon* this is judged and evaluated by Mr. Carpenter. She approaches the moment with trepidation: 'She was, indeed, at a momentous bar, with Mr. Carpenter as supreme judge, and her whole future career – so

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<sup>137</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p100.

<sup>138</sup> For more on this, see p 71-72 and p231-232.

she believed – hanging on his verdict’.<sup>139</sup> That verdict is not tempered out of consideration for Emily’s youth, inexperience, or even her recent ill health. In the summing up, Montgomery appears to offer a tongue-in-cheek critique of her own poetry, highlighting again the relationship between author and protagonist as Mr. Carpenter ‘insists that she avoid the trite topic of June, warns her away from imitations of Wordsworth, mocks her preference for the colour purple’<sup>140</sup> and brooks no argument against his rules. However, he does single out a few lines, and on that basis offers encouragement. But then comes Emily’s (and Montgomery’s) real triumph: Emily has mixed up her books,<sup>141</sup> and instead of her short story, Mr. Carpenter reads a brutally honest description of himself after one of his drinking sessions. His response? ‘Why I wouldn’t have missed this for all the poetry you’ve ever written or ever will write! By gad, it’s literature – *literature* – and you’re only thirteen.’<sup>142</sup> Emily is inspired by his verdict, and the novel ends with Emily confident and delighted, installed in her bedroom at New Moon and beginning her new project of writing a diary, and with the reader equally confident that Emily has found both her family and her vocation: ‘she has a story of her own and a voice to tell it’.<sup>143</sup> She has found her way to the beginning of her ‘Alpine Path’, and is ready to begin the climb.

Munro presents Del’s early development in a very different way – it is hinted at rather than analysed. Like Emily, Del loves and devours books. Before she grows to resent her mother for selling encyclopaedias, Del is every bit as impressed with them as Addie: ‘I shared my mother’s appetite myself, I could not help it. I loved the volumes [...] their weight (of mystery, of beautiful information) as they fell open’.<sup>144</sup> Del gleans

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<sup>139</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p331.

<sup>140</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p154.

<sup>141</sup> At least, Emily *claims* to have mixed up her books, there is always the possibility that this was deliberate, given the tension mentioned earlier between transparency and disingenuousness.

<sup>142</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p337. Italics in original.

<sup>143</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p154.

<sup>144</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p65.

this information, but becomes reluctant to display it, immune to her mother's criticism: 'You want to hide your brains under a bushel out of pure perversity but that's not my lookout'.<sup>145</sup> Emily may have to write in secret to preserve peace in the family, but Del also reads in secret, in a typically female effort to preserve the illusion of anti-intellectualism: 'This was the normal thing in Jubilee; reading books was something like chewing gum, a habit to be abandoned when the seriousness and satisfactions of adult life took over. It persisted mostly in unmarried ladies, would have been shameful in a man.'<sup>146</sup> Del cannot abandon her reading, her 'lovely, wistful, shabby old friends'<sup>147</sup> and to stave off potential mockery from Naomi, she distracts her with 'something she would never have believed could be in a book at all'<sup>148</sup> – namely, sex. There is something irresistibly comic in Munro's portrayal of the two girls, holed up in the town library and flicking determinedly through the pages of *Kristin Lavransdatter* until they come across the reference to 'this ill thing that was sung of in all the songs'.<sup>149</sup> It is a long way from *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. But while Del's early investigations with Naomi are essentially humorous, the interest in sex grows increasingly serious, and novels continue to provide her only information on the subject. Del is seething with curiosity and half-formed fantasies, and Munro expertly conveys the increasing sense of frustration with her own inexperience. For a girl so accustomed to the easy acquisition of knowledge, Del has difficulty accepting some experiences cannot be understood through academic research: 'I read modern books now. Somerset Maugham. Nancy Mitford. [...] In these books people did go to bed together, they did it all the time, but the descriptions of what they were up to there were not thorough'.<sup>150</sup> Del's interest cannot be satisfied by books alone

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<sup>145</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p67.

<sup>146</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p117.

<sup>147</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p116.

<sup>148</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p117.

<sup>149</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p118.

<sup>150</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p172.

– and her more practical investigations will be explored in detail in the next chapter<sup>151</sup> – but for now, it is more important to note her instinctive recourse to literature as the source of information.

But while Del's literary intake is charted, her output is less apparent. Until the end of the collection, Del does not officially declare herself a writer, and the writing she does is a peripheral component of the narrative – the only explicit references are to the poems she has kept inside *Wuthering Heights*, and to a poem she writes after a day out with Mr. Chamberlain. Perhaps then the strongest suggestion that Del is a writer during her childhood comes from again from the intertextual alliance with the Brontës – this time, Emily rather than Charlotte. Munro has spoken in several interviews about the influence Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* has had on her, firstly as a reader when 'that was the biggest book of my life'<sup>152</sup> and later as a writer. The wild, dangerous landscape of Brontë's moors seems to have a resonance for Munro's vision of Canada. In *Wuthering Heights* Lockwood observes that 'the sky and hills mingled in one bitter swirl of wind and suffocating snow'<sup>153</sup>, while in *Lives of Girls and Women* 'the snowbanks along the main street got to be so high that an archway was cut in one of them';<sup>154</sup> this is a country and a period where people are vulnerable to their natural surroundings, where the climate is an opponent, and the seasonal extremes a force with which to be reckoned; a country and a period with more similarities than one might expect to find with Brontë's. Munro appears to deliberately evoke the connection, and her fusion of what Stephen Regan characterises as 'actual harshness and symbolic potential'<sup>155</sup> alerts her reader to both the

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<sup>151</sup> For more on this, see p182-184.

<sup>152</sup> Alice Munro, 'Interview with Alice Munro', Beverly J. Rasporich, *Dance of the Sexes: Art and Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1990), p25.

<sup>153</sup> Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p11.

<sup>154</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p140.

<sup>155</sup> Stephen Regan, 'The Presence of the Past: Modernism and Postmodernism in Canadian Short Fiction', Coral Ann Howells & Lynette Hunter (Eds.) *Narrative Strategies in Canadian Fiction* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1991) p124.



reality and the emblematic significance of her setting.<sup>156</sup> The 'symbolic potential' can also be applied to Del. Until she openly declares herself, her talent is secret and hidden away from the reader. Emily Brontë's secrecy was well documented (indeed, was actively promoted) by her sister Charlotte, and so the suggested alliance of Del with Emily goes some way towards explaining the concealment of talent and ambition until a later stage in the narrative.<sup>157</sup>

Rose, in contrast, has a talent that is about *both* display and concealment. Her acting cannot happen in private – the point is to have an audience – but in childhood, the point of developing this talent is so that nobody realises she is acting to begin with. This is a dilemma Rose struggles with, as she learns how to achieve the right balance. A notable incident of failure at this happens in the story 'Half a Grapefruit'. In a 'Health and Guidance' class, the teacher takes a survey of what the class has eaten for breakfast, and Rose 'was wanting badly to align herself with towners, against her place of origin, to attach herself to those waffle-eating coffee-drinking aloof and knowledgeable possessors of breakfast nooks'.<sup>158</sup> So Rose boldly lies, claiming to have had 'half a grapefruit'. The point is not so much the lie itself, although it is interesting how Rose increasingly uses her professional talents to make herself into a social chameleon, but it is the limited success of the delivery: 'Rose was pleased with herself for thinking of the grapefruit and with the way she had said it, in so bold, yet natural, a voice. Her voice could go dry altogether in school, her heart could roll itself up into a thumping ball and lodge in her throat, sweat could plaster her blouse.'<sup>159</sup> In this passage, Rose is essentially describing a victory over stage-fright. She has improvised her lines, and delivered them beautifully.

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<sup>156</sup> For more on this, see p58-60.

<sup>157</sup> See Charlotte Brontë's 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell': 'I accidentally lighted on a MS. volume of verse in my sister Emily's handwriting [...] it took hours to reconcile her to the discovery I had made, and days to persuade her that such poems merited publication'. *Wuthering Heights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) p319-320.

<sup>158</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?* p52.

<sup>159</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p52.

However, this lie ultimately has unpleasant consequences for Rose, when she is slyly taunted for her pretensions, and is an early reinforcement of the paradoxical nature of her craft.

But while Rose hones her talent, she has little opportunity to study it. Access to books may be sometimes problematic for the budding novelists I consider, but access to the theatre for the budding actress is impossible. It is too far removed from her life. Still, the nature of her talent is imaginative, and Munro provides one intriguing snapshot of Rose studying *Macbeth*, a scene that establishes her early connection with acting: 'She memorized things from Shakespeare, and poems, other than the things they had to memorize for school. She didn't imagine herself as an actress, playing Lady Macbeth on a stage, when she said them. She imagined herself *being* her, being Lady Macbeth.'<sup>160</sup> It is a significant distinction. While the idea of 'being' rather than 'performing' could be included to mark Rose out as a method devotee in-waiting, it seems more important at this stage to observe how Rose, who is always so uncomfortable in her own skin, is absorbed in imagining she inhabits someone else's. Her childhood may not include theatre trips or amateur dramatics, but it is nevertheless a crucial training ground, where her developing talent is explained and tested.

Within the text of *A Bird in the House* it initially appears that Vanessa is also embarking on a period of apprenticeship. She is presented as intelligent, literary and precocious. She is also an avid reader – one of the few times she refers to the Depression as having a direct effect upon herself, rather than relaying the complaints of the adults, is when she explains that 'the family's finances in the thirties did not permit the purchase of enough volumes [...] to keep me going'.<sup>161</sup> Nevertheless, she manages as best she can, with her intake including Conan Doyle, Pauline Johnson, The Bible, Rudyard Kipling, the Oxf books, and of course, when all other supplies are exhausted, she has that

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<sup>160</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p65. Italics in original.

<sup>161</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p53.

omnipresent staple of the Canadian childhood, the Eaton's catalogue. Her appetite for reading does not fade as she moves through adolescence, and when she is seventeen, falls in love more than partly because of a shared interest in literature: 'Like me, Michael wrote stories and poems, a fact which he did not divulge to his Air Force friends. When we were together, there was never enough time, for we had everything to talk about and discover'.<sup>162</sup> The content or quality of these stories and poems is not shared with the reader, although as a child, Vanessa is a lot more forthcoming about her literary ambitions.

She writes constantly, but while this prodigious output is suggestive of a writer in the making, the narrative tone adopted is unusually dismissive. The adult Vanessa mocks her own childish efforts, noting that when composing her Egyptian tale 'my ignorance of this era did not trouble me',<sup>163</sup> and satirising her attempts at authenticity. Of course, many *Künstlerroman* narratives utilise the protagonist's juvenilia as a source of humour (Montgomery favours this exact tactic in the *Emily* trilogy), but these narratives usually go on to demonstrate how the protagonist progresses beyond their childish efforts and grow into their adult talent. *A Bird in the House* does not follow this pattern. Instead, Vanessa's derivative attempts at writing are held up for satire and then forgotten, while her lack of persistence is highlighted in detail:

I lay on the seat of the MacLaughlin-Buick feeling disenchantment begin to set in. Marie would not get out of the grey stone inn. She would stay there all her life [...] I felt I could not bear it. I no longer wanted to finish the story. What was the use, if she couldn't get out except by ruses which clearly wouldn't happen in real life?<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup>Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p169.

<sup>163</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p54.

<sup>164</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p153.

This episode of disenchantment invites a telling comparison to Del Jordan in Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*. Like Vanessa, Del's first forays into fiction are melodramatic, and represent a rejection of real life. However, *Lives* concludes with Del's resolve to celebrate reality rather than exaggerate it, and she commits herself to a career as the writer of her own, and her community's, story. Vanessa seems to lack the similar desire – her disenchantment is insidious rather than inspirational. Paul Comeau observes that she abandons the story because she is frustrated by the limited choices available to Marie – perhaps her fiction has begun to feel too close for comfort? He asserts that: 'An essential part of telling truths about the world will therefore be to expose these limitations and by disclosure to abrogate their pervasiveness. The dialogism inherent in Vanessa's fictional mode is integral to the process.'<sup>165</sup> But in discovering the limitations of her fiction, Vanessa has rejected it as a mode of expression – the 'process' Comeau refers to seems to belong to Laurence herself rather than her protagonist. For, if Riegel is right, and Vanessa's creativity is a response to grief, perhaps it then follows that this manifests itself as the escapist, romantic fictions she dreams up with the text, rather than comprising of the narrative itself. It would then appear that the creative working-through of grief is a stage rather than a vocation. Laurence's narrative persona is then more likely to be a voice of recollection rather than a writer of memoirs.

In contrast, *The Diviners* is deliberately engaged in debate as to how the dynamics of creativity and memory impact upon the writer. Morag's earliest efforts at fiction take the form of recording Christie's *Piper Gunn* stories for herself. Like Emily, she is presented as a 'natural' writer, driven by forces she does not completely understand: 'Morag is working on another story as well [...] She does not know where it came from. It comes into your head, and when you write it down, it surprises you, because you never

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<sup>165</sup> Paul Comeau, *Margaret Laurence's Epic Imagination* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005), p112.

knew what was going to happen until you put it down.’<sup>166</sup> This particular story that Morag writes moves away from Christie’s original, and instead he is included rather than recorded. Just as his stories emphasise the courage and beauty of Piper Gunn’s woman Morag, so too in a moment of tribute does Morag’s story describe ‘A little scrawny guy. Actually, though, he was very tough [...] people always laughed at him on account of he looked silly. But Piper Gunn, he knew one thing about Clowny for sure, and that was he was a great woodcutter’.<sup>167</sup> She does not show this story to Christie, but it is still a touching point of balance between them.

Morag does try and seek recognition for her poetry, but as mentioned in the section on mentors, her first attempt at this is not successful. Her Sunday School teacher is sweetly patronising – perhaps the worst possible response to a young writer: “The only thing,’ Mrs. McKee says, ‘is that it was a Far Eastern country, dear, so they wouldn’t have a wintry blast, would they?’”.<sup>168</sup> Later on in the class, Mrs. McKee reads out poetry by Hilaire Belloc, and Morag, feeling inadequate and humiliated, goes home to burn her own poem. The act of burning rejected literature is of well-documented significance in the history of women’s writing; for example, Montgomery has Emily burn her childhood diary so that Elizabeth cannot read it, and incinerate the manuscript of her first novel. This incident in Morag’s development has also been highlighted as the starting point in her struggle to develop an explicitly *Canadian* literary voice. Hildegard Kuester documents how Morag is stifled by saturation in American and English traditions, stating that ‘an examination of Morag’s life almost assumes the form of a documentary on the development of the Canadian literary landscape’.<sup>169</sup> Kuester offers the evidence of Morag’s American-influenced childhood imagination in the form of her imaginary friend

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<sup>166</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p87.

<sup>167</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p87.

<sup>168</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p79.

<sup>169</sup> Hildegard Kuester, *The Crafting of Chaos: Narrative Structure in Margaret Laurence’s The Stone Angel and The Diviners* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1994), p143.

‘Cowboy Jack’, and notes how formal education replaces the American influence with the English. Therefore, it is exceptionally significant to Kuester that the poem which makes Morag feel so inferior is explicitly introduced as ‘by the *English* poet’<sup>170</sup>. It is an interesting argument, but perhaps needs to be tempered by the acknowledgement that Morag’s poem is pretty abysmal – she is, after all, still a child.

The childhood stage of the *Künstlerroman* narrative provides a degree of insight into the personal and professional origins of the artist that reveals the process of their development as well as its typical components. And when considering the twentieth-century Canadian female *Künstlerroman* certain key patterns become evident in all five of the texts. There is the double degree of isolation inherent in their family circumstances, which reinforces the sense of the artist as socially marginalised; but this is also tempered by the protagonists’ developing degrees of affinity with and affection for their families. None of them ultimately rejects their family, or cuts them out of their life once they achieve success.<sup>171</sup> Instead, some of their seminal moments come from claiming their family connection; as when Emily comes to feel she is ‘of New Moon’, or when Morag acknowledges that Christie has been her father. They all find formal education initially challenging, and exhibit a degree of reserve in forming friendships with other girls; but they also tend to succeed academically, and the friendships they do form are deep and important. Even Del and Naomi’s competitive, pragmatic bond eventually culminates in a moment of sympathy and support, before Naomi’s shotgun wedding. They negotiate several different versions of the mentor / pupil relationship, from the benign patronage of the patriarchy to the sometimes resented guardianship of trail-blazing women and the predatory menace of the anti-mentor’s sexual agenda. And they channel these experiences into their earliest creative efforts, albeit with limitations upon their success.

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<sup>170</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p81. My italics.

<sup>171</sup> Rose is perhaps the most estranged, but even she remains in contact with Flo, and even the more difficult aspects of Flo’s personality in old age provoke pride and affection as well as resentment.

For it is important that none of these protagonists are presented as prodigies. The intuitive Emily is capable of sentimental doggerel. Del seems to lack a work ethic. Rose must learn the subtleties of her craft. Vanessa is melodramatic. And Morag is also insecure, also prone to sentiment. But the childhood element of the *Künstlerroman* narrative is important because of these early flaws and handicaps, not in spite of them. The narrative is one of development, and so the protagonists' childhood is crucial – if for no other reason than it provides an image of what the protagonist wishes to develop from, and an explanation as to why she might need to do this in order to move beyond childhood, and into the world of adult careers and relationships.

## Chapter Three

### *Adult Relationships and Careers*

*Some people think a woman's novel is anything without politics in it. Some think it's anything about relationships. Some think it's anything with a lot of operations in it, medical ones I mean. Some think it's anything that doesn't give you a broad panoramic view of our exciting times. Me, well, I just want something you can leave on the coffee table and not be too worried if the kids get into it. You think that's not a real consideration? You're wrong.*

*~ Margaret Atwood*



## Introduction

As outlined in Chapter Two, the *Künstlerroman* narrative largely depends on the delicate balance between the child and adult stages of the protagonist's life. If childhood dominates, the text becomes the story of a precocious child. If, on the other hand, the majority of the text is devoted to her adult life, the essential elements of psychological and creative development are overlooked or marginalised. Therefore, it is worth reiterating the necessity of considering both these narrative components in detail. Of course, the line between child and adulthood is never clear-cut, and a sense of arbitrary division is unfortunately unavoidable. But for the sake of the argument, this part of the discussion begins with the stage of life that best epitomises the complications inherent in attempting to separate the child from the adult: the unstable and unpredictable teenage years. During this stage, when the protagonists switch erratically from playful, childish ingenuousness to preternaturally mature sophistication, their personalities come into focus and their creative abilities are challenged by the distractions of adolescence – especially when it comes to their experiences of sexual awakening and desire. As this stage of life culminates in decisions about the future, the next section explores how the protagonists embark on the first stages of their adult careers, and how frequently this is presented as a period of struggle and persistence in the face of social and/or financial hardship.

In the female *Künstlerroman*, issues of marriage and family life are rarely presented as straightforward, and the chapter moves on to assess the protagonists' varied experiences of combining a career with romantic relationships. As Linda Huf and Evy Varsamopoulou highlighted, male romantic interests in the female *Künstlerroman* tend to be far less understanding than their female counterparts: 'who, rather than being an inspiration or Muse as women are in men's *Künstlerromane* [sic], are downright

unsupportive, and even obstacles when in love with the artist heroines'.<sup>1</sup> This section highlights the dilemmas and choices that are especially felt by the female artist, as she attempts to reconcile her intellectual and her emotional desires. It also considers the dilemma facing the authors – especially Montgomery – who must negotiate between narrative expectation and convincing characterisation. And, in light of Huf's assertion that female *Künstlerroman* protagonists are faced with a choice between procreativity and creativity, this chapter will also evaluate the presentation of motherhood in the texts and assess the significance of there only being two out of five protagonists presented as mothers.<sup>2</sup> Finally, this chapter must evaluate the success of these narratives as true *Künstlerroman* by considering the actual achievements of the protagonists as their careers mature – their creative output, their different degrees of success, and their own attitude towards their careers, as they come to participate in the literary and artistic culture of Canada.

### **Adolescence: Change and Challenge**

For any protagonist, adolescence represents a crucial period of adjustment, but the protagonist of the *Künstlerroman* has the added challenge of reconciling their talent with their developing sexual and social desires, and persisting with their art at a time when they would most like to be conventionally attractive and popular. This turbulent period therefore becomes a testing ground, trying both the protagonist's abilities and her dedication. Montgomery presents this in detail in the second volume of the *Emily* trilogy. *Emily Climbs* follows Emily from the ages of thirteen to seventeen, as she completes her education and begins her professional career, whilst experiencing the traumas and

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<sup>1</sup> Evy Varsamopoulou, *The Poetics of the Künstlerroman and the Aesthetics of the Sublime* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pxxii.

<sup>2</sup> Vanessa in *A Bird in the House* makes a passing reference to having children at the close of the narrative, but Rose and Morag are the only protagonists to be presented as mothers in detail.

challenges of adolescence. This is the period of her 'literary apprenticeship',<sup>3</sup> a time of struggles, setbacks, and successes. But while Emily's sense of self-identity is focused around her writing, other characters increasingly view her in terms of her developing sexuality. Emily must begin to come to terms with what it means to be a young woman in turn-of-the-century rural Canada. Yet it seems that her community is always a step ahead of her in this, projecting feelings and motivations onto Emily before she is quite aware of them, and for that reason there is an 'accidental' and sometimes forced quality to Emily's development as a woman that contrasts tellingly with the clarity and purpose of her development as a writer. She is far more comfortable with one aspect of her development than the other.

*Emily Climbs* begins with Emily awake in the middle of the night, and writing in her diary, which Montgomery incorporates into the narrative. Elizabeth Epperly describes the device as characterised by a 'scrupulous truth to adolescent ego, restlessness, and zest for life'.<sup>4</sup> This is fair enough, but the diary is also characterised by narrative duplicity and a disingenuous pseudo naïveté. The diary takes the place of Emily's old habit of writing letters to her dead father, and Montgomery suggests that Emily has not simply out-grown the comforting illusion of communicating with him, but has also moved beyond the stage when she can confide her feelings so absolutely in anyone. After all, what thirteen-year-old girl would tell her father her deepest secrets? Emily's natural inclination towards privacy has become increasingly important to her, and the diary offers her a release. While she develops her writing as a discipline through her poetry and short stories, the journal writing develops her sense of self and permits her free expression. But the self she expresses is creative as well as 'honest'; a literary creation

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass: L.M. Montgomery's Heroines and the Pursuit of Romance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) p169.

<sup>4</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p169.

as well as a factual report. Through the journal, Emily is constantly 'writing herself out'<sup>5</sup> into existence. Furthermore, the internal world of the diary helps Emily negotiate with the external world of family and community, as when she overhears the spiteful conversation of Ann Cyrilla and Beulah Potter.

These two unpleasant characters surprise Emily into hiding, so she is forced to eavesdrop, and suffers the indignity of listening at length to her own character assassination. Montgomery appears to use the episode not so much to embarrass her character, as to warn her: Emily is forced to view herself 'as ithers [sic] see us'.<sup>6</sup> She is mortified, but more importantly, she is made aware that others are already constructing her in sexualised terms. Ann Cyrilla describes her as 'very sly – sly and deep', while Beulah is even more forthright: 'She needs a tight rein, if *I* know anything of human nature [...] She's going to be a flirt – any one can see that. She'll be Juliet over again. You'll see. She makes eyes at every one and her only fourteen!'.<sup>7</sup> The gossip continues. Beulah censures Ilse for performing public acrobatics and revealing her legs: '*anybody* might have been passing. I felt so ashamed. In *my* time a young girl would have *died* before she would have done a thing like that'.<sup>8</sup> But this tale is outdone when Ann Cyrilla offers up one that is literally even more revealing: 'It's no worse than her and Emily bathing by moonlight up on the sands *without a stitch on* [...] *That* was the most scandalous thing'.<sup>9</sup> Having judged Emily (and Ilse) by their malicious standards, their verdict is the most damning one they are capable of imagining: 'no decent, sensible man will ever be bothered with her'.<sup>10</sup> Although on this last piece of slander, one must concede they may

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<sup>5</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p1.

<sup>6</sup> L.M. Montgomery, *Emily Climbs* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p60. Italics in original.

<sup>7</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p65. Italics in original.

<sup>8</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p67. Italics in original.

<sup>9</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p67. Italics in original.

<sup>10</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p68.

have a point; 'decent' and 'sensible' are not the words most readily used in description of Dean or Teddy.<sup>11</sup>

Emily finds the incident humiliating and profoundly unsettling, as she is disturbed to hear herself discussed as a sexually dangerous individual: 'Oh, I feel *soiled*, somehow – between my own silliness and their malice – and all dirty and messed-up mentally'.<sup>12</sup> While she has been cautiously coming to terms with her adolescence, she finds she has already been judged and found lacking, ideas and motivations have been imposed upon her before she has had the chance to even consider them. Emily spills her confusion into her diary: '[S]he also said I 'made eyes'. Now do I? I don't mean to – I know that; but it seems you can 'make eyes' without being conscious of it, so how am I going to prevent that? I can't go about all the days of my life with my eyes dropped down.'<sup>13</sup> When she was a child at Wyther Grange, Emily could ignore her Aunt Nancy's similar (though genuinely well-intentioned) attempts to sexualise her identity. But as a teenage girl, she is both more vulnerable and more curious, and the only way she can recover from this personal attack is through her writing: 'After all, I believe in myself. I'm not so bad and silly as they think me, and I'm not consumptive, and I *can* write'.<sup>14</sup> In this way, Emily re-claims control of her maligned body, her misconstrued behaviour, and her mocked ambitions.

But not all external influences are as clearly damaging, and as easily rebutted. Emily's friendships with Teddy Kent and Dean Priest are becoming increasingly complicated. Emily initially remains ignorant of Dean's feelings for her, describing him as 'the nicest and most interesting old person I know'.<sup>15</sup> Dean persists in spite of her almost relentless obliviousness, and continues to charm and fascinate Emily with his exotic

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<sup>11</sup> After all, if Teddy is not as obviously '*indecent*' as Dean, he is far too petulant to merit even the faint praise of 'sensible'.

<sup>12</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p69. Italics in original.

<sup>13</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p71.

<sup>14</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p76. Italics in original.

<sup>15</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p16.

adventures, his lavish gifts, and unconventional compliments that appeal to her sense of poetry: 'You aren't really very pretty, you know Star, but your face makes people think of beautiful things – and that is a far rarer gift than mere beauty'.<sup>16</sup> Yet, while Emily never questions his motives, it is increasingly clear that he poses a threat to her talent. Dean's jealousy seems primarily focused on Teddy, whom he already perceives as his rival. But far more subtle and insidious than his resentment of Teddy is his resentment of her writing. Emily trusts Dean as completely as she trusts Mr. Carpenter, and looks to them both for literary guidance. Yet Dean is already prepared to undermine her when he feels threatened by her commitment to writing. His condescending reaction feeds her deepest insecurities:

[He] seemed to say, "You can scribble amusingly, my dear, and have a pretty knack of phrase-turning; but I should be doing you an unkindness if I let you think that such a knack meant a very great deal." [...] If this is true – and it very likely is, for Dean is so clever and knows so much – then I can never accomplish anything worth while.<sup>17</sup>

When Dean claims her overtly, Emily rebels, 'I am not anybody's 'property', not even in fun. And I *never* will be';<sup>18</sup> but she cannot display such confidence in light of his more manipulative tactics to demoralise her; she cannot recognise the danger she is in. She perceives that Dean is jealous, but has no concept of what he is capable of doing in jealousy: 'I *think* he has a little of the Priest jealousy of sharing *anything*, especially friendship'.<sup>19</sup> And even after she begins to realise it is not merely her friendship Dean desires, she still cannot see that 'to listen to Dean Priest, intoxicating as his visions and stories and comments are, is to conspire in her own silence'.<sup>20</sup> Dean is also responsible

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<sup>16</sup>Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p215.

<sup>17</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p211.

<sup>18</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p31. Italics in original.

<sup>19</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p211. Italics in original.

<sup>20</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p174.

for one of her ruder awakenings when he accidentally lends her an explicit, if not actually pornographic, novel: 'I have another queer feeling, as if *some gate had been shut behind me*, shutting me into a new world I don't quite understand or like, but through which I must travel'.<sup>21</sup> Although there is of course the potential for this reaction to be a further example of Emily's journal self-censorship at work, the tone of revulsion seems genuine. Like Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), the 'golden gates' have well and truly closed behind Emily, and she is slowly forced to accept a new stage of her life.

In contrast, Del in Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* is anxiously and actively looking for the 'gate' that will let her out of childhood, rather than mourning its closure. She is increasingly concerned with obsessively collecting information about sex, frequently in collaboration with Naomi, as when they pore over a manual stolen from Naomi's mother in repelled fascination. Del is equally intrigued and horrified by the information they acquire, and even as she and Naomi conspire together, they are circumspect even with each other: 'Naomi and I held almost daily discussions on the subject of sex, but [...] there were degrees of candor we could never reach'.<sup>22</sup> The hormonal overload seems destined to find some outlet, but the events that follow are a disturbing shock. Del, not finding the knowledge she wants from her mother, from Naomi or from literature, enters into a deeply unsettling relationship with Mr. Art Chamberlain, the middle-aged lover of her mother's friend and lodger Fern Dogherty. Del casts this unlikely man in her vague fantasies, perhaps already aware that he feels some sexual attraction towards her: 'I imagined that Mr. Chamberlain saw me in my mother's black flowered dressing gown, pulled down off the shoulders, as I had seen myself in the mirror'.<sup>23</sup> But the reality that follows has little resemblance to these shadowy, voyeuristic daydreams. He begins to grope Del in hidden corners of the house,

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<sup>21</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p30. Italics in original.

<sup>22</sup> Alice Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women* (London: Penguin, 1971), p143.

<sup>23</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p151.

out of sight of her mother and Fern: 'He did not bother with a pinch on the arm or a pat on the arm or a hug around the shoulders, fatherly or comradely. He went straight for the breasts, the buttocks, the upper thighs, brutal as lightning. And this was what I expected sexual communication to be.'<sup>24</sup> It is a complex relationship to read. Mr. Chamberlain is a repelling, unpleasant character – but it is strangely difficult to take him seriously. He is gross, his behaviour is disgusting, and yet he somehow lacks the edge of menace one might expect. Magdalene Redekop has outlined the dilemma as one of over-familiarity: 'He is surely one of the most repulsive characters Munro has ever invented, and yet the danger is so domesticated, so diffused [...] that it is hard to remain aware of it'.<sup>25</sup> But this seems to miss the paradox at work: the mundane quality of Mr. Chamberlain that Redekop identifies is precisely what makes him so dangerous – he is dangerous *because* of his banality, not in spite of it. It is an inexplicably persistent cultural myth that the rapist is the random psychopath, brandishing a bread knife in some suitably darkened alleyway, when he is far more likely to be an acquaintance, a partner, or, like Mr. Chamberlain, a family friend. Munro's characterisation reveals both the threat he poses to Del, and the mundane mask that allows him to remain undetected.

More disturbing, however, than Mr. Chamberlain's behaviour is Del's tacit complicity in enabling it. She seems to take him on as a research project, apparently unconcerned by the potential risks this entails. So she perceives his crude attentions as 'the secret violence of sex',<sup>26</sup> and conspires with him against Fern. The climax (pun unavoidable) of this episode occurs with him taking her for a drive out of town and masturbating in front of her. Del is a detached observer to this performance, neither insulted nor aroused, but her composure does not lessen our upset and confusion. There is no easy way to react to or to understand the dynamics of this scene, although many

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<sup>24</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p159.

<sup>25</sup> Magdalene Redekop, *Mothers and Other Clowns: The Stories of Alice Munro* (London: Routledge, 1992), p70.

<sup>26</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p159.



have tried: Redekop is distressed enough to ask ‘has Del been violated or invaded on some level that is much more destructive than a literal rape would have been?’<sup>27</sup> This question can be read as redundant and potentially offensive; Del has not been raped, has not been beaten, has in fact, on this occasion, barely been touched. But her complicity is nevertheless unnerving, and it is understandable to assume that some sort of violation has been experienced, with potentially dangerous consequences.

I would propose that the answer to Del’s strange complicity is to be found in the concluding paragraphs of the story. Del is unsatisfied by her mother’s proposed manifesto of change and control – it seems too grounded in an ideology that ‘assumed being female made you damageable’.<sup>28</sup> However disturbing, unpleasant or degrading the episode with Mr. Chamberlain appears, Del has somehow gained a degree of sexual confidence from it – as if the exhibition, albeit a repellently self-indulgent and perverted one, of another human’s sexual desires has validated or legitimized her own. It is not an easy conclusion to reach, and the gender politics behind it are complex, but it seems futile to deny Del’s sense of survival and triumph in her final observation: ‘men were supposed to be able to go out and take on all kinds of experiences and shuck off what they didn’t want and come back proud. Without even thinking about it, I had decided to do the same.’<sup>29</sup> She confidently rejects the traditionally passive female sexual role, and is instinctively alert towards the possibility of something more satisfying.

There are obvious parallels between this incident and Rose’s experience in the ‘Wild Swans’ chapter of *Who Do You Think You Are?*. In this story, Rose is travelling alone for the first time on the train from Hanratty to Toronto. The journey is already loaded with symbolic meaning; she has won the money for the trip in an essay competition, so she is travelling away from Hanratty and Flo before she even gets on the

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<sup>27</sup> Redekop, *Mothers and Other Clowns*, p72.

<sup>28</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p173.

<sup>29</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p174.

train. Flo's warnings to avoid 'White Slavers' and 'people dressed up as ministers'<sup>30</sup> seem provincial and faintly ludicrous, to both the reader and to Rose, who has already learned to 'not believe anything Flo said on the subject of sex'.<sup>31</sup> And yet Rose falls into the precise scenario that Flo has warned her against, when the man sitting beside her, a middle-aged United Church minister, with a scrubbed face and neatly brushed hair, begins to grope her behind his newspaper: 'She found it alarming [...] She could not bring herself to look. Was there a pressure, or was there not? She shifted again. Her legs had been, and remained, tightly closed. It was. It was a hand. It was a hand's pressure'.<sup>32</sup> Not only is the man's behaviour strikingly reminiscent of Mr. Chamberlain's, but the two men are even drawn on similar physical lines. And while they are somewhat lacking in terms of conventional physical menace – 'When he stood up she saw that he was shorter even than she had thought, that his face was pink and shiny, that there was something crude and pushy and childish about him'<sup>33</sup> – this is surely compensated for by the accompanying phallic symbolism.

However, in 'Wild Swans' Munro goes still further in questioning the conventions of adolescent female desire. For Rose is, perhaps despite herself, perhaps willingly, extremely aroused by the experience. She feels a 'sly luxuriance'<sup>34</sup> creeping through her body, and as the train moves inevitably towards Toronto, Rose moves inevitably towards an orgasm at once involuntary and empowering. Even as this man is assaulting her, Rose has already relegated him to a mere masturbatory accessory: 'A stranger's hand, or root vegetables or humble kitchen tools that people tell jokes about; the world is tumbling with innocent-seeming objects ready to declare themselves, slippery and obliging'.<sup>35</sup> It is then a deliberately provocative incident, to which Munro offers no easy answers; she has

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<sup>30</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p57.

<sup>31</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p58.

<sup>32</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p63.

<sup>33</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p66.

<sup>34</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p64.

<sup>35</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p65.

no qualms about leaving her reader stranded and confused. If the basic events of the story were removed from their context, the narrative as extracted would be appalling, and yet Munro contrives to destabilise our disgust. One possible way to negate, or to at least distance this confusion might be to read the story as an allegory. The title 'Wild Swans' is clearly suggestive of Yeats, and of the rape of Leda by the swan.<sup>36</sup> This story could then be read as a clever reversal of the legend, refreshing the old tale by changing the perspective, and exploring the 'female mythology of male'.<sup>37</sup> Rather than being idealised, or even victimised, Rose commandeers narrative control, and in a sly aside Munro reveals how she will later utilise the experience in her adult sex life: 'He remained on call, so to speak, for years and years, ready to slip into place at a critical moment, without even any regard, later on, for husband or lovers'.<sup>38</sup> However, while this type of symbolic reading offers a tempting escape route from confronting the complexities of the story's morals, it overlooks the narrative's insistent corporeality. Ultimately, the story ends with Rose delighting in her own physical presence, her capacity for change and renewal: 'To dare it; to get away with it, to enter on preposterous adventures in your own, but newly named, skin'.<sup>39</sup>

This sense of adolescent daring and reinvention is lost when considering *A Bird in the House*. Vanessa's initiation into adult relationships is more conventional, and yet arguably has a far more painful impact on her. During World War II she falls in love with a young airman, Michael, and enjoys a gentle, almost old-fashioned courtship. They discuss poetry together, with Laurence assigning Michael a prescient, if slightly pessimistic intellectualism: 'Hardly any poetry that I've seen says it the way it really is. You know what I think? Writing's going to change a lot after the war. It did after the

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<sup>36</sup> See William Butler Yeats 'The Wild Swans at Coole' (1917) and 'Leda and the Swan' (1928).

<sup>37</sup> Beverly J. Rasporich, *Dance of the Sexes: Art and Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1990), p63.

<sup>38</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p66.

<sup>39</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p67.

First War and it will even more after this one. There aren't any heroes any more'.<sup>40</sup> The serious, literary dynamic of their relationship is oddly reminiscent of Dean and Emily's – hardly a promising association – and the physical connection is equally unsatisfactory. *A Bird in the House* is, for Laurence, remarkably shy and restrained when it comes to the characters' sexuality. Vanessa admits to being scared of sex: 'I never actually made love with him. I was afraid. He did not try to persuade me, although he knew I wanted to as much as he did'.<sup>41</sup> Vanessa also says that she despises this fear, and expresses a wish to overcome it, but the tone does not deliver the strength of its claims; the narrative voice is muted, lacks conviction, so that the desire to have sex and the fear that prevents her are delivered in the same blank platitudes, devoid of any real passion. The dominant emotional relationship in Vanessa's life continues to be with her family, and the focus of the narrative quickly focuses back on this. The relationship with Michael ends abruptly, when Vanessa discovers that he is already married. She is shocked and saddened, but her anger seems less directed at him than at her Grandfather, who, in a moment of spite or perception, suggested that this must be the case: 'I'll bet you a nickel to a doughnut hole he's married. That's the sort of fellow you've picked up, Vanessa'.<sup>42</sup> Vanessa cannot forgive him for being right, and her anger remains within the family.

Vanessa first meets Michael at a Saturday night dance that is also frequented by Morag Gunn in *The Diviners*. Their experiences are strikingly similar. Vanessa complains of her height and her inability to flirt, comparing herself unfavourably to her daintier, prettier friend Mavis: 'Anyone tall, washed, witty and handsome in the vicinity asked her out'.<sup>43</sup> When Morag goes to these dances, she has similar problems: 'too tall for many of them, not actually taller than they are, but five-eight and they prefer tiny frail creatures like Eva, who they can look down on and who will say *Gee! Really?* to everything they

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<sup>40</sup> Margaret Laurence, *A Bird in the House* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985), p170.

<sup>41</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p168.

<sup>42</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p172.

<sup>43</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p167.

say'.<sup>44</sup> This degree of overlap positions *A Bird in the House* as a 'first draft' of the *Künstlerroman* narrative that is extended in *The Diviners*,<sup>45</sup> and this is reflected by the decreasing amount of information about Vanessa's adult life. Still, there is plenty to consider when moving on to *The Diviners*. Morag does not connect with anyone at the dance (presumably Vanessa made off with the only man in the air-force who enjoyed talking about Stephen Spender) and is especially embarrassed by the time when she was 'emboldened by a boy's friendly half-shy smile and had asked him if he liked poetry. Hell no, he had said, he was raised on a chicken farm and hated the buggers. Thinking she had said *poultry*'.<sup>46</sup> Instead, Morag is already tied to Jules Tonnerre, although their connection is deeper and driven by a far more complicated affinity than an appreciation of poetry. Jules is the son of Lazarus, and the brother of Piquette. Morag and Jules already have something of a history. They attended the same school, and recognised each other as fellow outcasts from mainstream Manawaka society. Morag is sexually drawn to Jules from a very early stage. He frightens her when he first propositions her, but although she runs from the encounter, it fuels her imagination later: 'one hand between her legs and brings herself, with her eyes closed, imagining his hard flesh bones skin on hers'.<sup>47</sup> Later, before Jules goes to war, they share a physically satisfying, if prematurely concluded, sexual encounter, and Morag persuades Jules to tell her the 'other side of the story' when he supplements her personal Piper Gunn mythology with his father's stories about the Métis uprising and Chevalier Tonnerre, recorded in Morag's memory as 'Skinner's tale of Lazarus's tale of Rider Tonnerre'.<sup>48</sup> Significantly, it is Jules who offers Morag her first cigarette – 'He laughs at her and shows her how [to inhale]' – <sup>49</sup> introducing her to another habit she will find impossible to break. For Morag, rather like Emily, finds her

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<sup>44</sup> Margaret Laurence, *The Diviners* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1980), p149.

<sup>45</sup> For more on this, see p38.

<sup>46</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, 151. Italics in original

<sup>47</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p129.

<sup>48</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p144.

<sup>49</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p127.

adult life is entwined with that of her adolescent companion, and her relationship with Jules will continue until the end of his life.

As well as signalling an awareness of romantic narrative convention, the lasting nature of the relationships between Emily and Teddy and Morag and Jules also serves to exemplify a more lasting significance to the portrayal of adolescent challenges and change. For despite the turbulence and transformative energy that characterises the presentation of adolescence in all the texts, this is also a time when the protagonists' adult personalities are developing and crystallising – these are the traits that will endure into their adult lives, and construct the foundations upon which their future careers are built. Therefore, while the portrayal of adolescence is essential in establishing the protagonists' psychological characteristics and personal connections, the next step is an evaluation of how this is combined with (indeed, is dependent upon) their developing sense of artistic identity.

### **Finding an Identity**

As the protagonists leave their childhoods behind, and begin to explore the world of adult relationships, it is revealing to consider how this affects their non-romantic ambitions. Do they gather momentum and progress towards greater success, or are these dreams shelved, overtaken by hormones, hairstyles and adolescent hysteria? Is it possible for these young women to simultaneously develop their social and intellectual lives, or are these two elements increasingly incompatible?

For Emily, her teenage years are a period of intense artistic development. She is dedicated and determined, but she has reached the point where she must pursue her studies beyond Mr. Carpenter's village schoolroom. She is eager to attend the Shrewsbury High School, but her ambitions bring her back into conflict with Aunt Elizabeth. The first objection is levelled at her desire for a career: 'you are not under the necessity of

working for your living'.<sup>50</sup> The second objection concerns something too disgraceful to be so easily articulated. As she grows up, Emily is increasingly made to answer for her mother's elopement. Elizabeth is genuinely scared that Emily will repeat Juliet's scandalous actions, for no other reason than that she is her mother's daughter. It is especially infuriating given that Emily can barely remember the woman who has bequeathed her this burdensome reputation: 'Suppose we leave my mother out of the question – she's dead'.<sup>51</sup> And while Elizabeth cannot, short of locking her back in the spare bedroom, prevent Emily eloping, she can try and curb her niece's other propensity to un-Murray like (and therefore by default immoral) behaviour: she can demand that, if Emily is permitted to go to high school, she must give up writing fiction. Emily is then faced with a dilemma, but Mr. Carpenter is instrumental in guiding her through it. He is, in fact, delighted with the stricture: 'It's just what you need. It will teach you restraint and economy'.<sup>52</sup> And so Emily begins the next stage of her climb, leaving the familiarity of New Moon for the excitement of Shrewsbury, and the trials of living with Aunt Ruth. In sending Emily to her Aunt Ruth, Montgomery is able to re-instigate the narrative pattern of the orphaned protagonist who must struggle for acceptance. Interestingly though, this does not make for a book called *Emily of Shrewsbury*, in the style of the Anne series. Emily *has* her home, and her primary narrative is the pursuit of her career, not the relocation of her person. This detail, as well as perhaps offering a hint towards the concluding episode with Janet Royal, reaffirms that Emily's priority is to climb her 'Alpine Path', and establish herself as a writer.

Emily scrupulously sticks to her agreement with Aunt Elizabeth, and can therefore apply herself only to schoolwork, her journal, and her poetry. In a trilogy full of insights into how Montgomery viewed the creative process, this is perhaps one of the

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<sup>50</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p81.

<sup>51</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p219.

<sup>52</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p92.

most revealing: she considered poetry to be 'true'. Montgomery was a prolific poet herself, and while her poetry has not retained the readership of her novels she 'considered the writing of poetry her highest calling, and her achievement in verse her greatest gift'.<sup>53</sup> In her portrayal of Emily as a young poet, Montgomery offers both a self-portrait, and also a manifesto for the type of poetry she believed in so completely. The *Emily* trilogy and *Emily Climbs* in particular, on account of its detailed presentation of Emily's developing style, is read by E. Holly Pike as 'a justification of Montgomery's own career and taste in poetry'.<sup>54</sup> Montgomery wrote the *Emily* novels in the 1920s, the decade of Eliot and Pound, but the *Emily* books are set at the turn of the century. Free verse may have been in the ascent, but Montgomery did not consider that it was poetry and set her narrative back away from it. In the *Emily* trilogy, form and metre are paramount, and the only blank verse Emily writes is childish doggerel, when she is too young to know better. 'For Emily, as for Montgomery, poems always rhyme',<sup>55</sup> as seen in Emily's retort to the unbearable Evelyn Blake: 'I didn't make "beam" rhyme with "green" in *my* poem. If I had I'd be feeling very badly indeed'.<sup>56</sup> The objection to modernism goes beyond the structural. Montgomery's poetry was written from an essentially Romantic tradition, and so too then is Emily's. Montgomery expresses her own delight in nature and beauty through Emily, promoting the view of the poet as 'one who searches for beauty and attempts to share that beauty with others, and who has a peculiar sensitivity to beauty'.<sup>57</sup> This beauty is most often found in the natural landscape, a landscape that is explicitly Canadian. Similarly, her instantly memorable criticism of Tennyson shows Emily rejecting the definition of poetry as a male preserve: 'I detest Tennyson's *Arthur*. If I had

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<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth Waterston, 'Reflection Piece – The Poetry of L.M. Montgomery' Irene Gammel & Elizabeth Epperly (Eds.) *L M Montgomery and Canadian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p81 (pp77-88).

<sup>54</sup> E. Holly Pike, '(Re)Producing Canadian Literature: L.M. Montgomery's *Emily* Novels', Irene Gammel & Elizabeth Epperly (Eds.) *L M Montgomery and Canadian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p68 (pp64-73).

<sup>55</sup> Pike, '(Re)Producing Canadian Literature', p68.

<sup>56</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p110. Italics in original.

<sup>57</sup> Pike, '(Re)Producing Canadian Literature', p68.



been *Guinevere* I'd have boxed his ears [...] As for *Geraint*, if I had been *Enid* I'd have bitten him'.<sup>58</sup> It appears that Montgomery, and Emily, are poets who, while in sympathy with an ideology that is predominantly English and male, can only accept the principles of the ideology if they can re-work them from a perspective that is female and Canadian. Pike proposes that through using the *Emily* trilogy to explore her poetic principles, and outline her ideas about Canadian poetry, Montgomery 'implicitly argues for her own inclusion in the canon of Canadian literature'.<sup>59</sup>

In light of Montgomery's view of poetics, we can appreciate how poetry is allowed to qualify as 'true' writing. The final form of writing permitted Emily may be equally problematic for some readers to conceive of as 'true': Emily begins a career in journalism. Aware that she owes her education to her relatives, and disliking being indebted to them, she is determined to earn enough money to repay them. With this aim in mind, she immediately puts her skills to practical use: 'I'm to get two cents for every news item I send the *Enterprise* and twenty-five cents a week for a society letter to the *Times*'.<sup>60</sup> Emily always maintains a distinction between her writing and her journalism: the former is her calling and the latter a means to an end; 'one mustn't scorn the base degrees by which one ascends young ambition's ladder'.<sup>61</sup> So, while her society letters and wedding reports appear weekly in print, she does not consider herself a published writer until her first poem is accepted by a magazine. Throughout *Emily Climbs*, the journal extracts are a busy record of submissions sent out and rejections returned, until she finally gets her break: 'She grew dizzy – the letters danced before her eyes – she felt a curious sensation of choking – for there on the front page, in a fine border of curlicues, was her poem – *Owl's Laughter*, by Emily Byrd Starr'.<sup>62</sup> This is a seminal moment for the

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<sup>58</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p222. Italics in original.

<sup>59</sup> Pike, '(Re)Producing Canadian Literature', p68.

<sup>60</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p100. Italics in original.

<sup>61</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p324.

<sup>62</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p131. Italics in original.

professional writer; her creative identity is confirmed and validated by publication. After gaining this new threshold on the climb, Emily is revitalised. She continues to submit, continues to be rejected – but she now also receives acceptances, and each success builds her confidence against each rejection. However, at this stage in her career, Emily is paid with subscriptions and vouchers rather than actual money, and must find extra work if she is to be in any way self-sufficient.

A summer job, and a frightening episode that will be considered in Chapter Four,<sup>63</sup> bring Emily into contact with a fascinating old woman who recognises something special in her and tells her a story that will become Emily's first great success: 'you haf the way and it is you I will be telling my story'.<sup>64</sup> Emily may have imagined herself as boxing the ears of King Arthur, but old Mrs. MacIntyre has exceeded her, and actually spanked the future King Edward of England when he was a naughty child. If Emily's fantasy suggested the rejection of a literary patriarchy, then Mrs. MacIntyre's story appears as a triumphant defeat of it, both in its subversive plot, and in its delivery to Emily from the predominantly female tradition of oral story-telling. Emily's disturbing experience has provided her with a literary gift: 'the psychic experience prepares the way for some larger creative possibility'.<sup>65</sup> Not long after this episode, the financial generosity of Aunt Nancy releases Emily from the restrictions upon her writing, and 'The Woman Who Spanked The King' is her first published story, accepted by 'a New York magazine of some standing'.<sup>66</sup> Emily is paid forty dollars, and her family's objections to her career are silenced. Even Aunt Elizabeth, who always insisted there was no need for Emily to earn a living, appears to develop a grudging respect for her craft.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> For more on this, see p245-246.

<sup>64</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p193. 'Haf' is Montgomery's rendition of a Scottish accent.

<sup>65</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p169.

<sup>66</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p262.

<sup>67</sup> Throughout the trilogy it is remarkable how quickly Elizabeth can be won over by Emily earning money, despite her repeated reiterations that she does not need to work for a living. This could simply be a convenient device for removing Elizabeth's objections, but with Elizabeth's essential frugality and ancestral

However, despite the frequent references to Emily's burgeoning literary income, the next challenge to Emily's developing identity proves that she is not merely motivated by financial gain. Throughout *Emily Climbs*, 'questions about identity and love and art are bound up with each other', and they combine when Emily is asked the most difficult question yet.<sup>68</sup> Emily is given the opportunity to leave Prince Edward Island and live in New York, as the protégée of the successful writer and journalist Janet Royal. Initially afraid she will be forbidden to go, Emily finds the issue becomes far more complicated when she is told to make her own decision: 'It *was* a splendid chance – everything made easy [...] success certain and brilliant and quick. Why, then, did she have to keep telling herself all this – why was she driven to seek Mr. Carpenter's advice?'.<sup>69</sup> Mr. Carpenter, like her family, does not tell Emily what to do, but his objections, and Emily's own realisations, end the novel by staking a claim for a Canadian literature that offers further insight into Montgomery's sense of national artistic identity. Emily turns down the chance to be assimilated into the American canon, accepting Mr. Carpenter's criticism of Janet Royal: '[S]he isn't a Canadian anymore – and that's what I wanted you to be – pure Canadian through and through, doing something as far as lay in you for the literature of your own country, keeping your Canadian tang and flavour.'<sup>70</sup> Emily's decision to stay at New Moon is then an explicit decision to be a Canadian artist, and to win her success on her own merit rather than allow Janet Royal to make 'the Alpine Path no more than a smooth and gentle slope'.<sup>71</sup> She has made her own way this far, and will continue to do so, acknowledging the origins of her talent and the conditions that can best inspire her are both to be found at New Moon: 'Some fountain of living water would dry up in my

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pride in mind, Montgomery may have been influenced by the old stereotypes about the Scots tight purse strings.

<sup>68</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p177-178.

<sup>69</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p305. Italics in original.

<sup>70</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p305-306.

<sup>71</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p305.

soul if I left the land I love'.<sup>72</sup> While *Emily Climbs* is concluded with the formalities of Emily's rejecting Andrew's proposal, and her dashed hopes of hearing Teddy's, these are merely details, and Emily admits that their lasting impression on her is a 'feeling of relief that I still have my freedom' (although of course she is still a teenager at this point, and her feelings about unmarried life will not always be so positive).<sup>73</sup> Nothing, and no one, is allowed to detract the attention from how far Emily has climbed, and what she has won. She has completed her apprenticeship, has learned to 'smile over a rejection slip' and try again, has resisted the chance of easy success in America, and dedicated herself to becoming a Canadian writer. Emily appears to have grown into her ambitions, her talent has been recognised, and the reader anticipates that she will have the success she deserves. And yet there is one jarring note – Emily's final hope that 'Perhaps Teddy was only shy'<sup>74</sup> – and with that Montgomery reminds us of all the difficult decisions still ahead for her fictional alter-ego.

In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Del is already struggling to make these kinds of choices. In the title story of the collection, Addie offers her much analysed opinion that there 'is a change coming I think in the lives of girls and women'<sup>75</sup> and urges Del to use her brains and have self respect. It is a crucial speech within the text, and bears repeated analysis. Del is irritated by her mother's warning, but nevertheless it strikes a chord. She recognises that she wants more from her life than Naomi, who has left school, got herself an office job, and started stockpiling domestic accessories for the married life that will inevitably follow. This lifestyle – at once frivolous and prematurely middle-aged – has no appeal for Del, who finds Naomi's company increasingly strange and confusing. When Naomi persuades Del to accompany her to a dance, and after the dance to a hotel with two men, Del finds the evening depressing and disorientating – and her response is

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<sup>72</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p311.

<sup>73</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p320.

<sup>74</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p325.

<sup>75</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p173.

at once ludicrous and delightful – she climbs out the bathroom window and goes home to read *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. But not even *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* can convince Del that her future lies purely in academia. She excels at high school, but never really engages, and barricades her doubts behind a collection of ‘A’ grades: ‘if I missed one I could feel a dangerous gap’.<sup>76</sup> She has a half-hearted relationship with her fellow over-achiever Jerry Storey, after they are identified by their peers as ‘The Brains Trust’: ‘We were depressed at being paired off like the only members of some outlandish species in a zoo, and we resented people thinking we were alike, for we did not think so’.<sup>77</sup> They have some shared goals, but scientific Jerry is unable to appreciate Del’s artistic intelligence, and her pride is offended at this awkward, unattractive boy being allocated to her as a potential sexual partner.

Del’s dilemma is articulated in her response to an article by a psychiatrist, who illustrates the difference between ‘male and female habits of thought’ by asserting that if a couple look at the night sky together ‘the boy thinks of the universe, its immensity and mystery; the girl thinks, “I must wash my hair”’.<sup>78</sup> Del is insulted, but unable to completely reject the psychiatrist’s authority. She is torn between ambition and desire, and can find no precedent for reconciling the two: ‘I wanted men to love me, *and* I wanted to think of the universe when I looked at the moon. I felt trapped, stranded; it seemed there had to be a choice where there couldn’t be a choice.’<sup>79</sup> As Beverly Rasporich has observed, ‘the clash between the head and the heart, intellect and sexual passion, is an archetypal theme in literature’,<sup>80</sup> and she draws a further intertextual link, comparing Del’s crisis to that of Thomas Hardy’s protagonist Jude in the relentlessly bleak *Jude the Obscure*. In a similar, though less portentously symbolic way, Munro

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<sup>76</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p192.

<sup>77</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p193.

<sup>78</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p177.

<sup>79</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p178. Italics in original.

<sup>80</sup> Beverly J. Rasporich, *Dance of the Sexes: Art and Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1990) p50.

personifies these opposing forces as Del's two love interests: Jerry Storey's intellectual companionship is counter-pointed by the physical allure of Garnet French. If Mr. Chamberlain was characterized by an absence of Gothic sexuality, Garnet is saturated in it, and will prove far more threatening to Del's identity than her complacent molester. He is, inevitably perhaps remembering the influence of *Wuthering Heights*, drawn to a Heathcliff-ian specification; dark, intense, sardonic, with a troubled criminal past and all the romantic allure of the terminal outsider. They have an instant and overwhelming physical attraction, that finds Del shocked into accepting the language of romantic literature that has previously seemed so removed from her own experiences: 'it is like fire, just as they say'.<sup>81</sup>

Munro's writing never negates the power of the physical – she understands its potency, and conveys its attraction without judgment or reserve. In her narrative, virginity is not lost, but abandoned, outgrown, and the pleasures of the body are granted just as much legitimacy as the pursuits of the brain. Del experiences a powerful sexual awakening, and revels in her new knowledge: 'Sex seemed to me all surrender – not the woman's to the man but the person's to the body, an act of pure faith, freedom in humility'.<sup>82</sup> The Gothic edge to the affair only enhances Del's pleasure in it – she enjoys the drama of social and familial objections to the relationship, and when they first have sex, she takes a medieval satisfaction in the visible, bloody proof of the experience: 'When I saw the blood the glory of the whole episode became clear to me'.<sup>83</sup> It is easy for the reader to be equally seduced by the recognizable romance of this affair, and easy to sympathize with Del when her mother (as mothers in romances are obliged to do) protests that Del is throwing her chances away: 'You've gone all addled over a *boy*. You with your intelligence. Do you intend to live in Jubilee all your life? Do you want to be

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<sup>81</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p208.

<sup>82</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p215.

<sup>83</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p224.

the wife of a lumberyard worker?’.<sup>84</sup> It is easy to read this as a ‘real’ romance. But it is as also as easy as it is unavoidably obvious to perceive that Addie is right. Ildikó de Papp Carrington has articulated the fundamental paradox of this as one of power: ‘The complete wordlessness of the sensual world into which Garnet pulls Del underscores the dramatic irony of her belief that she now possesses unlimited power. In fact, she is losing the power to control her life [...] her power depends upon her ability to manipulate language as a detached observer.’<sup>85</sup> For the first time in her life, Del has abdicated from her position as a hoarder of literary knowledge. She is no longer motivated by the desire to read, to interpret her world through language. Her new responses are purely, uninhibitedly, physical. Del drifts through her scholarship examinations in a languid haze of post-coital detachment, and it becomes starkly obvious that this *Künstlerroman* is on the verge of becoming a narrative of failure.

As if to underline the potential for this classic mode of female frustration, Naomi reappears, pregnant and preparing for a quick, quiet wedding after unsuccessfully attempting to induce a miscarriage. Del has carelessly asserted that ‘I did not fear discovery, as I did not fear pregnancy. Everything we did seemed to take place out of range of other people or ordinary consequences’,<sup>86</sup> but she is abruptly confronted with a reality she wants no part of. It seems to give Del the wake-up call she needs – she can admit what she has always been aware of – this is not and never will be for the rest of her life. She may not admit it is what she is doing, but she is about to follow her mother’s advice: ‘There is a change coming I think in the lives of girls and women. *But it is up to us to make it come*’.<sup>87</sup> Garnet however has other ideas, and Del’s struggle to extricate herself from the relationship is finally physical as well as mental. He attempts to ‘baptise’ Del in

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<sup>84</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p217. Italics in original.

<sup>85</sup> Ildikó de Papp Carrington, *Controlling the Uncontrollable: The Fictions of Alice Munro* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1989) p89.

<sup>86</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p228.

<sup>87</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p173. My italics.

the river, a mock ceremony that takes on a serious dimension as their different expectations become clear. Garnet is thinking of marriage, Del is finally thinking of herself. As he tries to force her under the water, Del experiences a new revelation: 'I felt amazement, not that I was fighting Garnet but that anybody could have made such a mistake, to think he had real power over me'.<sup>88</sup> Del's break from Garnet is no more a fairytale ending than her marriage to him would have been. She has already failed her scholarship exams, losing her best chance of a passport out of Jubilee. She is desperately unhappy, even as she knows she has saved herself more effectively than any baptism: 'I was free and I was not free. I was relieved and I was desolate'.<sup>89</sup> This is not the pivotal struggle of her life – she is still a teenager – and as Redekop strikingly observes: 'Like an orgasm, this kind of struggle is not an ending but something that will be repeated'.<sup>90</sup> Still, if Redekop's imagery holds true, the struggle in itself is not unsatisfactory: 'Baptizing' is arguably the most complex story in the collection, moving as it does from alienation to elation and returning back again. But there is nothing regressive about the concluding paragraphs. Del may be still struggling with the same dilemma, but she is finally taking control of it: 'the future could be furnished without love or scholarships'.<sup>91</sup>

Of course, Del's assertion raises the question of who exactly will do this at 'furnishing'. Del appears confident in this moment, at this stage of her life, that she can provide fulfilment for herself. While this confidence may well be transitory or misplaced, the desire behind it can be seen as an important element of all the protagonists' psychology – with the exception of Vanessa. Again, the lack of detail and the curtailed nature of Vanessa's narrative post-childhood make it difficult to draw useful points from the text. But it is still apparent that Vanessa's future is furnished *for* her rather than *by* her.

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<sup>88</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p51. Her resistance echoes Emily's early incredulity at the idea of belonging to Dean, suggesting an inherent autonomy in the psyche of the *Künstlerroman* protagonist

<sup>89</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p237.

<sup>90</sup> Redekop, *Mothers and Other Clowns*, p84.

<sup>91</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p238.



Vanessa is the only protagonist considered in this study who does not have to fund her own university education. Emily finishes education after high school. Del and Rose apply for scholarships. And Morag earns the money before she begins. In contrast, Vanessa's mother sells the family china and conscripts donations from relatives, to provide her daughter with this chance: 'When I was your age [...] I got the highest marks in the province in my last year of high school. I guess I never told you that. I wanted to go to college. Your grandfather didn't believe in education for women, then'.<sup>92</sup> On the one hand, this is a touching moment, and testifies to the benefits as well as the limitations of Vanessa's exceptionally close family life. Yet there is an element of adversity and initiative missing from the narrative. There are no chapters that deal with the details of Vanessa's life after Manawaka. But the narrative coda does at least show some acceptance of her identity, if not an active struggle to define it. Vanessa is twenty when her Grandfather dies, and in her third year of university. His death is the end of an era. Following his funeral, the narrative skips forward some twenty or so years, with the adult Vanessa on a brief trip back to Manawaka. It is in these closing paragraphs that she relates the death of her mother: 'Of all the deaths in the family, hers remained unhealed in my mind the longest'.<sup>93</sup> It is also accorded the least narrative space, as if some things cannot be recalled into words. However, what Vanessa has finally learned to voice is the debt that her character owes to her Grandfather Connor. The similarity between them has been commented on in earlier stories, but always rejected. Finally, as an adult, Vanessa can accept that 'I had feared and fought the old man, yet he proclaimed himself in my veins',<sup>94</sup> and thus come to terms with part of her heritage. Yet again, the family narrative is crucial, but at least it is finally brought to a place where Vanessa is no longer dominated by it.

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<sup>92</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p175.

<sup>93</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p178.

<sup>94</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p179.

*The Diviners* has a far vaster scope than *A Bird in the House*, and reveals Morag's search and struggle towards creative identity in vivid detail. After graduating from high school, Morag works as a jobbing reporter for the local paper, *The Manawaka Banner*. It is a further point of connection with the *Emily* trilogy, and initially seems to fulfil the same functions: providing the protagonist with money and valuable experience, and providing the narrative with a source of light relief. Journalism never appears as a tempting career for either Emily or Morag, which is perhaps not surprising considering their experiences of small-town news. For example, in *Emily Climbs*, Emily is memorably sabotaged by the typesetter, and landed in hot water with an indignant bridal party: 'I sent in quite a nice report of it, I thought, specially mentioning the bride's beautiful bouquet of 'roses and orchids' – [...] there was no excuse whatsoever for that wretched typesetter on the *Times* turning 'orchids' into *sardines*.'<sup>95</sup> Similarly, Morag is frequently frustrated by the petty banalities of rural reporting. She finds the reports she is sent in to edit a source of despairing hilarity: 'Mrs. Cates had red roses on a silver baskt [sic] and four kinds cake served [sic]'.<sup>96</sup> However, ultimately Morag's experiences at *The Banner* serve a far more serious narrative purpose. It is her job at *The Banner* that sends Morag to the scene when Piquette Tonnerre and her two small children are killed in a fire. The sight - and, more sickeningly, the smell of '*Bois-Brûlés*'<sup>97</sup> - are horrific, and the experience traumatizes Morag. As previously explained it forms an uneasy level of connection between her and Jules when they next meet, and this alliance of Morag's uneasy repulsion with Jules's bereavement drives and twists their connection forwards. The fire also leads to Morag's first direct experience of censorship, and explicitly confronts her with the racial politics that rarely have to be voiced out loud in the Manawaka community. In her obituary of

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<sup>95</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p209. Italics in original. Of course, this is a ridiculous error – there are seven letters in 'orchids' and eight in 'sardines' – and the incident therefore can be linked to the general antipathy towards marriage that characterises the *Emily* trilogy and will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

<sup>96</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p155.

<sup>97</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p159. Italics in original.

Piquette, Morag includes the information that her grandfather was involved in the last Métis uprising, but her editor deletes this, 'saying that many people hereabouts would still consider that Old Jules back then had fought on the wrong side'.<sup>98</sup>

Morag's time at *The Banner* comes to an end, and she finally leaves Manawaka to go to college in Winnipeg. Whilst the most obvious relationship that she develops here is with her future husband Dr. Brooke Skelton, I would pause first to consider the longer lasting, and ultimately much more rewarding, relationship that she establishes with her new friend, Ella Gerson. As with Emily, I argue that the validation Morag receives from female friends and mentors is invaluable in understanding her creative progress, and Morag's relationship with Ella is ultimately far more beneficial than the one with Brooke in supporting and sustaining her artistic identity. They form a life-long connection that supports their ambitions, and rather than being presented as competitors, they are full of genuine praise for each other's work. Morag first meets Ella when they are both hesitating outside the offices of the college magazine, *Veritas*. Morag is nervously considering submitting a short story, Ella is equally hesitant about handing in her poetry. Recognising each other as kindred spirits, they postpone submitting their work and retreat together to talk, and to read each other's writing. Morag is impressed by Ella's poetry, and does her best to accept Ella's praise for her story: 'A friend for life, Ella. Even though Morag knows that the story is badly flawed and suspects that Ella knows, too'.<sup>99</sup> In Ella, Morag finds a conspirator and a confidant. They can discuss their literary ambitions, their personal problems, and their family pasts. In Ella, Morag has a friend who not only sympathises with the eventual difficulties of juggling work and family, but *understands* them; their correspondence is rich with support; 'I'm not at all surprised that the collection of poems has been accepted. Well, hallelujah! When does it come out? The

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<sup>98</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p161.

<sup>99</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p181.

novel progresses, slowly'.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, Ella's own family – widowed mother and two sisters – are warm and welcoming to Morag, providing her with a comforting refuge, and allowing her to be vulnerable:

Morag has never known anything like this kind of house before [...] it breaks her up and she considers it a disgrace to cry in front of anybody [...] the girls leave her tactfully alone. Not so Mrs. Gerson [...] Morag Gunn, nearly twenty, five-feet-eight, grown-up, puts her head on the shoulder of Ella's mother and cries as if the process had just recently been invented.<sup>101</sup>

This all-female household becomes a haven for Morag during her university years. Succoured by the maternal affection of Mrs. Gerson, and the intellectual stimulation of Ella, Morag becomes increasingly confident, both as a writer and as a young woman. Ella's beautician sister Bernice gives her a new hairstyle, and Mrs. Gerson, as well as physically feeding her up, launches her on a diet of Russian literature which expands her horizons, and adds a further dimension to her journey towards finding a Canadian voice: 'she first truly realises that English is not the only literature'.<sup>102</sup> Shortly after becoming friends, Ella and Morag push themselves into submitting their work to the magazine. It is only with the publication of her short story, 'Fields of Green and Gold', that Morag comes to the attention of Brooke, and moves towards a new stage of her adult life.

This section has only charted certain elements of the protagonists' struggle to find and develop their artistic identities. It is one thing to consider this in the context of family, education, and the first experiments with sex and relationships. It becomes altogether more complicated as those experiments make way for more serious relationships – the commitment of marriage, and in the case of Rose and Morag, the

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<sup>100</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p329.

<sup>101</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p185.

<sup>102</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p186.

responsibility of children. If up to this point, the protagonists' identities have been challenged, it is in this arena that the real interrogation begins.

### Marriage and Family Relationships

This section of the study will focus almost exclusively on Emily, Rose and Morag, as there is no information in *Lives of Girls and Women* about Del's eventual adult relationships, and while the coda to *A Bird in the House* reveals that Vanessa has children, there is simply not enough material there to work from. This also frees this section to try and explore in greater detail the complexity of the adult relationships experienced by the remaining three protagonists. The discussion of their adult relationships is, more than any other section in this chapter, framed by two of the five characteristics that Huf identifies as essential to the female *Künstlerroman* narrative. Firstly, Huf posits that the female artist protagonist is undermined rather than inspired by her choice of partner; 'men are not muses or models who guide or lift her upward and onward. Rather they are despots or dunces who drag her down'.<sup>103</sup> Secondly, she insists that the female artist must choose between creativity and procreativity, and an attempt to combine the two inevitably results in a 'schizophrenic shuffle' between 'two competing sets of demands: those of others and those of work'.<sup>104</sup> Of course, these dilemmas are far from exclusive to the female artist; they have applied (and continue to apply) to women in all types of careers. Still, it is the complex struggle to reconcile creative fulfilment and personal satisfaction that drives this section of the chapter, via a consideration of how Huf's two laws might apply to the twentieth-century Canadian *Künstlerroman*.

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<sup>103</sup> Linda Huf, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman* (New York: Frederick Unger, 1985), p9. Interestingly, Huf takes an exclusively heterosexual perspective – the position of the lesbian artist is overlooked – an omission to keep in mind, even though my choice of texts does not allow me to fully explore the implications of this.

<sup>104</sup> Huf, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Women*, p6.

Throughout the *Emily* trilogy, Emily's obvious 'love interest' is Teddy Kent, and she admits the extent of her feelings (if only to herself) after they spend a night taking shelter from a storm. During that night, Emily discovers that: 'She had always known she liked Teddy better than any other male creature in her ken – but *this* was something apart from liking altogether – this sense of belonging to him that had come in that significant exchange of glances.'<sup>105</sup> Epperly maintains this is another manifestation of the artistic sympathy that bonds Emily and Teddy together. For, even as she realises that she loves him, a chance remark of his delivers her greatest inspiration yet: the idea for her novel *A Seller of Dreams*. 'It is as though Teddy fits into Emily's artistic world, can even call out the best creative impulses in her'.<sup>106</sup> But, beyond a glance, Teddy gives no sign that he too appreciates the significance of the moment, and there is something that remains unsettling in Emily's feeling that she is 'never really to belong to herself again'.<sup>107</sup> It seems that Emily's 'romance' is, from the very beginning, more about her compromising herself rather than genuinely finding fulfilment.

As she grows up, Emily's life is altered and she does not appear to be in control of the changes: 'Life at New Moon had changed. She must adjust herself to it. A certain loneliness must be reckoned with'.<sup>108</sup> She loses her friends, as Teddy, Perry and Ilse all move away. And with the death of Mr. Carpenter, she loses her teacher. The change marks a new stage in Emily's life, as she begins to feel that her choices have carried a cost. Her one remaining companion is Dean, and, she is increasingly dependent on him: on his company, and on his judgement. It is a dependency Dean quickly exploits. His condescending remarks about her 'little hobby'<sup>109</sup> bite home, and his increasingly adamant feelings confuse her, until she comes to 'two hateful convictions. One was that

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<sup>105</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs* p269. Italics in original.

<sup>106</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass* p177.

<sup>107</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p276.

<sup>108</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p6.

<sup>109</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p31.

she could never do anything worth doing with her pen. The other was that she was going to lose Dean's friendship. For friendship was all she could give him'.<sup>110</sup> While Emily is not defeated, she is struggling. Her career seems to progress well enough: 'the percentage of acceptances rose steadily [...] She knew she was steadily gaining the mastery of her art'.<sup>111</sup> Yet Montgomery does not expand beyond this. While *Emily Climbs* contained a detailed catalogue of the poems and stories Emily sent out, and full reports on their success, these details are absent from the beginning of *Emily's Quest*. Her career has been displaced from the centre of the narrative, and now the pages here are devoted not to what Emily writes, but to what Teddy *does not*: 'the correspondence was not what it was. Suddenly in the autumn Teddy's letters had grown slightly colder and more formal'.<sup>112</sup> The tone of the trilogy has shifted, until Marie Campbell argues that it appears to be 'the story not of a writer but of a woman negotiating the complexities of romantic entanglements'.<sup>113</sup>

And yet despite this pessimistic perspective (which risks neglecting the potential for Emily to be *both* a writer and a romantically entangled young woman), Emily is at last ready to embark on the novel she imagined, *A Seller of Dreams*. Her instinct tells her that she achieves something special: 'And it was *good*. She knew it was – felt it was'.<sup>114</sup> Rejections from three different publishers shake her confidence, and so Emily makes the worst mistake possible, personally as well as professionally. She hands her book over to Dean. Epperly points out that in this concluding part to the *Emily* trilogy, the two elements of Emily continue to be dependent upon each other for existence. Montgomery portrays the 'inseparability of the woman from the writer; to doubt and betray one is to

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<sup>110</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p32.

<sup>111</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p33.

<sup>112</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p33.

<sup>113</sup> Marie Campbell, 'Wedding Bells and Death Knells: The Writer as Bride in the *Emily* Trilogy' Mary Henley Rubio (Ed.) *Harvesting Thistles: The Textual Garden of L.M. Montgomery* (Guelph: Canadian Children's Press, 1994), p141 (pp137-145).

<sup>114</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p47. Italics in original.

silence and revoke the power of the other'.<sup>115</sup> Dean, jealous and manipulative, dismisses her novel with a killing kindness: 'It's a pretty little story [but] Fairy tales are out of fashion. And this one of yours makes overmuch of a demand on the credulity of the reader [...] How could you write a real story? You've never *lived*.'<sup>116</sup> Dean betrays her confidence, but Emily does something far worse. She betrays herself, allows Dean's verdict to overthrow her own opinion. After all, Emily is a published writer and poet, while Dean appears to have no career at all, never mind a literary or artistic one. She is the professional; he is a well-read layman. She lets Dean then assume a false authority, based on age and gender rather than actual qualifications, and he exercises it with brutal results. Emily burns her book and, fleeing from the fireplace, trips on a pair of scissors and falls downstairs, the scissors twisted into her foot.

Emily is nearly killed, comes close to having her foot amputated, and is bedridden for six months with a mysterious back injury, unsure if she will be able to walk again. However, the most significant consequence of this is not physical, but rather it is that Emily is now almost completely dependent on Dean. Kate Lawson notes that she has been 'brought to the seeming nadir of her fortunes, she is gravely injured, estranged from Teddy and [has lost] her essential connection to the poetic realm'.<sup>117</sup> Dean's response to her plight is unexpected: it is certainly not that of a one-dimensional villain. For rather than having him continue to manipulate and undermine Emily, Montgomery shows him as supportive and sympathetic – which only increases Emily's dependence: 'There was nobody but Dean. He had never failed her – never would fail her [...] without him life was a bleak, grey desert, devoid of colour or music. When he came the

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<sup>115</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p182.

<sup>116</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p51-52. Italics in original.

<sup>117</sup> Kate Lawson, 'The "disappointed" house: Trance, loss and the uncanny in L.M. Montgomery's *Emily* Trilogy', *Children's Literature: Annual of the Modern Language Association Division on Children's Literature*, (2001) p78 (pp71-90).



desert would – for a time at least – blossom like the rose of joy.’<sup>118</sup> Dean has what he wants, he has become the centre of Emily’s world, however drastically diminished her world may be, and he can afford to be generous in victory; although he does not yet realise what he has won. For, after she begins to recover, Emily decides that she will marry Dean Priest. It is a difficult decision to understand, especially as Montgomery keeps the reader excluded from Emily’s thought processes, but it can probably be explained by a combination of sympathy, depression and Dean’s prolonged campaign of grooming her towards this conclusion.

The engagement meets with the inevitable disapproval of Emily’s family (and Dean’s), but Epperly points out just how superficial these objections are: ‘her form of rebellion is really a capitulation to the most potent and least acknowledged of their beliefs: the man rules and the woman obeys’.<sup>119</sup> Emily’s engagement is, despite its shock value, the most conventional of affairs. She submits herself to Dean, and writes no more, telling a concerned Ilse that ‘Oh, I’m done with *that*. I seem to have no interest in it since my illness. I saw – then – how little it really mattered – how many more important things there were’.<sup>120</sup> She does not even appear to read, except with Dean. Instead, the literary catalogue is replaced by a domestic itinerary, as the couple prepare their house: the Disappointed House that has fascinated Emily since she arrived at New Moon, and where she made her first childish pacts with Teddy.<sup>121</sup> Her obsessive furnishing appears as a desperate attempt to fill in the gap left by her abandoned career. She is acutely aware that she has signed herself away to Dean; there are ‘hours in which her soul felt caught in a trap – hours when the great, green emerald winking on her finger seemed like a fetter. And once she even took it off just to feel free for a little while’.<sup>122</sup> Yet she cannot bring

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<sup>118</sup> Lawson, ‘The “disappointed” house’, p57.

<sup>119</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p187.

<sup>120</sup> Montgomery, *Emily’s Quest*, p63. Italics in original.

<sup>121</sup> For more on this, see p73.

<sup>122</sup> Montgomery, *Emily’s Quest*, p79-80.

herself to take her freedom back completely. The normal world does not offer an acceptable means in which she can be liberated from her promise to Dean, and so it falls to the paranormal to save her.<sup>123</sup>

Emily may be released from her engagement, but she can only be restored to herself once she has a renewed confidence in her creative ability. And, despite Epperly's perception of a creative alliance between Emily and Teddy, it is ultimately Dean who helps her recovery. Once more, Montgomery complicates this already difficult character, insisting that the reader cannot dismiss him as a cartoon villain, however distasteful his behaviour appears. Dean is shown as realising that to leave Emily after she has broken the engagement would leave her indebted to him through guilt – and he chooses to relinquish his power over her:

If he had gone then she never would have been quite free – always fettered by those piteous eyes and the thought of the wrong she had done him. Perhaps Dean realised this, for there was a hint of some malign triumph in his parting smile [...] He walked down the path – he paused with his hand on the gate – he turned and came back.<sup>124</sup>

Dean returns to let Emily know that he lied to her; her book was as good as she suspected. And within three pages, we see the difference this makes. Throughout Emily's illness and engagement, Montgomery's narrative has remained strictly third person. Only after she has recovered from both does the narrative switch back to the first person journal. Emily's voice is restored, vibrant and humorous, her work once more a priority, and her sense of self reclaimed. There are some unsettling interpretations to be gleaned from this turn of events. It may seem Montgomery is proposing that Emily's creative identity is subservient to her romantic relationships; she cannot write during her engagement, and needs Dean's 'forgiveness' to resume her career after their separation.

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<sup>123</sup> For more on this, see p246-247.

<sup>124</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p96-7.

But this overlooks the subtlety of their relationship, and the way in which Dean has infiltrated his way into Emily's emotional life through years of careful grooming. I would posit that she clearly suppresses her writing rather than abandoning it, and that the complexities of her relationship with Dean mean that this is an extreme situation rather than necessarily setting a precedent for her future. And there is nothing ambiguous or unsettling about Emily's wholehearted delight in resuming her career. 'Suddenly – the flash came – again – after these long months of absence – my old, inexpressible glimpse of eternity. And all at once I knew I could write'.<sup>125</sup>

However, the pleasure of her achievement is tainted by the news that Teddy is to marry Ilse. It is Ilse who announces it to Emily, completely unaware of her friend's feelings, and of the long series of misunderstandings and missed moments that have taken place between Emily and Teddy. Characteristically, Montgomery portrays the loving relationship between her female characters in far greater detail than their allegedly romantic relationships with men. Even though Emily and Ilse's friendship is strained by distance, silence and jealousy, their feelings for each other still break through. After an awkward visit, Ilse rushes back to embrace Emily, declaring 'I love you as much as ever – but everything is so horribly changed'.<sup>126</sup> Emily affirms her own love for Ilse, and Montgomery describes the parting with a poignant sensuality that never appears in scenes between Emily and Teddy: 'They kissed lingeringly – almost sadly – among the faint, cold, sweet perfumes of night'.<sup>127</sup> The bittersweet tone reinforces the sense that their fractured friendship is far more valuable than the man (Teddy) who disrupts it.

Marriage in general does not do well in the *Emily* trilogy. While the *Anne* books feature a series of successful marriages, match-making plots, wedding set-pieces, and happily married couples, these are all conspicuously absent from Emily's world. Marriage

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<sup>125</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p102.

<sup>126</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p169.

<sup>127</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p169.

in the *Emily* trilogy is quite literally never celebrated: there are a couple of minor weddings that take place off stage, Ilse's planned festivities are spectacularly aborted, and the series ends before we see Emily married to Teddy. This ambivalence towards marriage is presented in the greatest detail when Ilse jilts Teddy. Having repeatedly stressed that Ilse is wild, outrageous, and unconventional, Montgomery is able to safely use this character to explicitly rebel against the idea of marriage. Ilse weeps, smashes her wedding gifts, and expresses the heartfelt wish that 'one could only go to sleep unmarried – and wake up married',<sup>128</sup> rather than endure the actual ceremony. Still, the trilogy *has* to end in the marriage of Emily and Teddy. Public, publishers and narrative convention all demanded this 'happy ending' from Montgomery, and it is left to the critical reader to determine whether or not she delivered. For while Montgomery had to pay lip-service to the 'happy ending' of marriage, her own life, and her treatment of marriage in the trilogy, indicate an understandably sceptical attitude to this notion.<sup>129</sup> The narrative of marriage is ultimately less important or interesting than the narrative of Emily's career. However, she also acknowledges that a successful career does not necessarily guarantee personal happiness, candidly describing Emily's increasing loneliness, that her work cannot quite compensate for: 'Alone? Ay, that was it. Always alone [...] She had some very glorious hours of inspiration and achievement. But mere beauty which had once satisfied her soul could not wholly satisfy it now'.<sup>130</sup> Montgomery, working within a restrictive framework, nevertheless delivers a unique insight into the career / marriage dilemma, and the choices it forces women to make. Throughout her life, Emily makes constant sacrifices for the sake of her writing. She rejects success in New York to remain a Canadian artist. She loses her close friendship with Ilse rather than share her private thought-processes and

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<sup>128</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p210.

<sup>129</sup> Montgomery herself married in order to have a family rather than for romantic love, and her married life was afflicted by her husband's depression. For more on this, see Mary Henley Rubio, *Lady Maud Montgomery: The Gift of Wings* (Toronto: Doubleday, 2008).

<sup>130</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p221.

feelings. And while the marriage to Teddy is an essentially unsatisfactory narrative formality, there seems to be no doubt that, whatever else Emily may give up in settling on him, she does not give up her work; not because Teddy inspires or supports her, but because her writing is the essence of her character.

Emily's narrative ends then with the conventional coda of marriage. This is a pattern that Munro seeks to disrupt: as well as offering an unusual structural approach to the *Künstlerroman*, she also challenges the conventions of women's life-writing. The traditional narrative of a woman's life ends in marriage; *Who Do You Think You Are?* continues Rose's narrative through and beyond this state, with the stories that follow 'The Beggar Maid' filling in some of the gaps as well as extending the story still further. In *Who Do You Think You Are?* Munro is committed to a full and far-reaching portrayal of female life and creativity, and she approaches the task of describing Rose's adult life with a frank, unapologetic insight into human behaviour.

Rose's husband, Patrick is not an attractive character; Munro chooses not to duplicate the charismatic Garnet, and instead presents Rose's lover as an altogether more everyday creation. Peevish, pedantic and supercilious, he nevertheless is granted a precarious dignity, and while the reader may be amused by his petty acts of snobbery, his feelings for Rose are no laughing matter. He compares her to a painting of 'King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid',<sup>131</sup> and when Rose looks it up in the library she is entranced by the image this offers:

She studied the Beggar Maid, meek and voluptuous, with her shy white feet.

The milky surrender of her, the helplessness and gratitude. Was that how

Patrick saw Rose? Was that how she could be? [...] She could not turn

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<sup>131</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p79.

Patrick down. She could not do it. It was not the amount of money but the amount of love he offered that she could not ignore.<sup>132</sup>

Captivated by this vision and dazed by his affection, Rose drifts into the same stupor that afflicted Del during the height of her passion for Garnet. She happily 'plays out the ancient scenario of beggar maid to the chivalric rescuer'.<sup>133</sup> This desire to perform what is expected makes a parody of the first time they have sex, an 'unpracticed counterfeit of passion' that he happily accepts.<sup>134</sup> In a lovely stroke of pointed irony, Munro has Patrick anxious about *his* performance only once Rose has stopped 'faking it'; he is completely unprepared for her to actually experience an orgasm.

Even at this point in the relationship, Rose is not blind to the limits of her role as the 'beggar maid'; no actress would desire one part for the whole of her career. She perceives how Patrick is determined to change her, not in spite of his love for her, but apparently because of it:

Patrick loved her. What did he love? Not her accent [...] Not her jittery sexual boldness [...] All the time, moving and speaking, she was destroying herself for him, yet he looked right through her, through all the distractions she was creating, and loved some obedient image that she herself could not see.<sup>135</sup>

But even as she can acknowledge this, she has no inclination to stop it, and the relationship only gathers momentum. They suffer the social agonies of meeting with their respective families. Rose is humiliated by the experience of visiting Patrick's wealthy parents; he is appalled by Flo's cheerful and deliberate show of vulgarity. Of course, the only possible response to this mutual discomfort and disappointment is for them to get engaged. This is perhaps the first major crisis of Rose's life. She is confronted with what

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<sup>132</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p80.

<sup>133</sup> Rasporich, *Dance of the Sexes*, p64.

<sup>134</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?* p84.

<sup>135</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p85.

E.D. Blodgett describes as the prospect of ‘becoming his story, not her own’,<sup>136</sup> of being sublimated once and for all by his vision of her as the beggar maid. The reader might expect that Rose has two choices; she can marry Patrick or she can refuse to. What we perhaps do not expect is for Rose to do *both*.

Munro describes Rose’s break-up from Patrick with a brutal rush of dialogue: there is a minimum of narrative, and the scene has a script-like quality. The third-person narrator has stepped back; we can observe, but we are never fully admitted to Rose’s thoughts, to what has finally pushed her over the edge. Interestingly, it is precisely this sensation of being an observer to a scene in a play that motivates Rose to change her mind a short time later:

Then she had a compelling picture of herself. She was running softly into Patrick’s carrel, she was throwing her arms around him [...] She saw them laughing and crying, explaining, forgiving [...] This was a violent temptation for her; it was barely resistible [...] It was not resistible after all. She did it.<sup>137</sup>

Rose is after all still tempted by self-dramatisation, by the allure of playing the romantic lead in real life: ‘[she] abandons her controlling position as the nonparticipating observer and rushes onto the stage’.<sup>138</sup> She is so attuned to the possibilities of the scene that she is unable to resist the starring role. But there is also a more compassionate element to her behaviour; having perceived how easily she could please and appease Patrick’s hurt feelings, she is driven by this as much as by the dramatic potential of her actions.

The story could easily end here, but what is perhaps the most striking feature of ‘The Beggar Maid’ is Munro’s use of the narrative timescale. All through the collection, there is a rejection of simple linearity, and the narrator presents Rose’s ‘future’ alongside her ‘past’. However, it is in ‘The Beggar Maid’ that this original deployment of different

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<sup>136</sup> E.D. Blodgett, *Alice Munro* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1985), p95.

<sup>137</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p97.

<sup>138</sup> Carrington, *Controlling the Uncontrollable*, p133.

timeframes is used to the most dramatic effect. Suddenly, Munro rushes the reader through the break-down of Rose and Patrick's unhappy marriage – in just a few pages they are swept from their reunion to their divorce, all told from the perspective of a much older Rose, who has gone over this story many times: 'She said that she and Patrick had been married ten years, and that during that time the scenes of the first breakup and reconciliation had been periodically repeated'.<sup>139</sup> Munro has the story finally conclude with a chance encounter between Rose and Patrick at the airport, nearly a decade after they have divorced. This episode provides the reader with the first definite information about Rose's career; she is by now a well-know television interviewer. But it also serves to underlie what the quick résumé of their disintegrating marriage has previously negated: the pain and the bitterness that is suddenly brought into brutal focus.

In 'Mischief', the next story in the collection, Rose and Patrick are still married, and have had a daughter, Anna. When Rose was in the maternity ward, she became friends with Jocelyn, and eventually she embarks on a furtive, abortive affair with Jocelyn's husband Clifford. As ever, Munro is unsentimental about friendship and relationships: Rose and Jocelyn are confidants, Clifford and Jocelyn have an apparently devoted marriage but neither of these things prevents Rose and Clifford from becoming attracted to each other. The affair begins at an excruciating party, and ends unconsummated in a bus depot. It is at one level farcical, but Munro is adept at conveying the real pain, the real disappointment, the fact that many episodes in life do have a farcical quality once narrated. The culmination of the narrative is located in one of many evenings an older, divorced Rose spends with Jocelyn and Clifford. This particular evening concludes with a spectacularly un-erotic threesome. This scene has been inevitably provocative: W. J. Keith faults Munro for 'covertly defending (or at the very least refusing to openly condemn) an action that seems irresponsible and even

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<sup>139</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?* p98.



repellant'.<sup>140</sup> It is certainly an interesting opinion as to the narrator's role, but even for readers who do *not* expect the narrative voice to be constantly judgmental this is still a difficult episode to deal with. Munro forces the reader into a position of compounded voyeurism of watching Jocelyn watching Clifford and Rose. Neither the narrator nor Rose herself make this easy for the reader – just as we are forced to accept the farcical nature of their earlier 'affair', we must accept the necessity of this night, and Rose's decision to keep Clifford and Jocelyn in her life after it: it is hard to argue with her parting shot, 'she needed such friends occasionally, at that stage of her life'.<sup>141</sup>

While 'Mischief' contains an account of Anna's birth, Anna herself remains a peripheral character, and this is reflected in the majority of critical reaction to *Who Do You Think You Are?*. Rose is rarely read as a mother and Magdalene Redekop has written a whole book on Munro's portrayal of mothering without mentioning once that Rose is a mother herself. The closest Rose comes to sharing the limelight with Anna is in 'Providence', when after her parents' divorce, Anna elects to spend some time living with Rose. Despite Rose's best intentions, her daughter becomes something of an impediment to her life, however treasured. Rose takes a 'stunning, fearful pleasure'<sup>142</sup> in Anna's company, and is never presented as a less than loving mother. But there is something about the relationship between them that remains underdeveloped, verging on the unconvincing. This is one role that Rose cannot successfully inhabit; perhaps it is too important to become another performance. Whatever the rationale for the decision to underwrite this aspect of Rose's identity, Rose and Anna eventually part with a sense of mutual relief. Rose acquiesces with little protest to Patrick's suggestion that Anna should move back and live with him and his new wife. Rose offers a valid reason for her complicity. She does not want Anna to have the kind of childhood that she had herself:

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<sup>140</sup> W.J. Keith, *A Sense of Style: Studies in the Art of Fiction in English-Speaking Canada* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1989) p158.

<sup>141</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p136.

<sup>142</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p145.

‘Poor, picturesque, gypsying childhoods are not much favored by children, though they will claim to value them, for all sorts of reasons, later on’.<sup>143</sup> And so Anna grows increasingly immersed in the trappings of her upper-class lifestyle – ‘She practiced ballet and rode her horse every day’.<sup>144</sup> Of course, what does not need to be spelt out here is that in sending Anna back to Patrick, Rose is resigning herself to never being completely accepted by her daughter: Anna will grow up into a different strata of society, accustomed to a degree of money and privilege that is beyond her mother’s understanding as well as her budget.

*The Diviners* is the only other book in the study to portray the protagonist’s experience of marriage (and indeed of motherhood) in detail. Morag’s future husband is an Englishman born in India, fourteen years her senior, a college lecturer who teaches her seventeenth-century poetry class. Brooke and Morag begin dating, and, on a technicality, he becomes her first lover. Her initiation is a painful experience for Morag, and only marginally less so for the reader. From the very outset, Brooke’s attitude to Morag is patronising, controlling and excruciatingly condescending, with an unbelievably cringe worthy line in pillow-talk: ‘Don’t be alarmed, love,’ he says. ‘Women always wonder, the first time they see a man naked and erect, if there’s enough room inside themselves. Well, there *is*.’<sup>145</sup> Inexplicably charmed by this, Morag not only goes through with having sex with Brooke but agrees to marry him and move with him to Toronto, even though this means abandoning her degree. Of course, all this – marriage, Toronto – represents Morag’s struggle to put as much distance between her new self and Manawaka as possible. She has not yet subscribed to Paul Comeau’s universal rule for Laurence’s

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<sup>143</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p155.

<sup>144</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p163.

<sup>145</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p199. Italics in original. Although I feel one can safely assume this is actually the *last* thing any woman would need to think on seeing Brooke naked.

protagonists, that 'liberation does not consist of moving away from Manawaka'<sup>146</sup> but of accepting its place in her history. Refusing to admit the truth of this, Morag instead manages to almost complete the transformation of herself into the perfect middle-class housewife: 'She watches her diet carefully and is slender. She wears lightly tailored suits in the daytime, with pastel blouses, sometimes frilled [...] She looks smart. She is a competent cook'.<sup>147</sup> However, there are already cracks in the façade. Further along in this litany of how Mrs. Skelton occupies her time, we learn that: 'She writes short stories and tears them up [...] One day she throws a Benares brass ashtray through the kitchen window'.<sup>148</sup> Morag's urge to create is frustrated and stifled; not only is she unable to write, but Brooke is resistant to her desire for children, constantly telling her that it is not yet the right time to start a family. In fact, there is only one child Brooke is interested in creating, and it is Morag. He diminishes her with belittling pet names, calling her 'child' and 'little one', and signals a desire for sex by asking if she has 'been a good girl?':

It has become his game, his jest, before going into her, and indeed before permitting his arousal or hers. If she protests the sentence, he will withdraw all of himself except his unspoken anger. She has to play, or be prepared to face that coldness.<sup>149</sup>

Finally, Morag's pent-up creativity explodes, and she begins to write her first novel, *Spear of Innocence*. The writing is not only a release, it is an alternative form of existence, as she pours herself physically into the character she creates and the narrative she spins. Morag is, as Nora Foster Stovel memorably phrases it, a 'method writer'<sup>150</sup> and her creative process is all-absorbing. Ironically, this alternative existence is what perhaps sustains her

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<sup>146</sup> Paul Comeau, *Margaret Laurence's Epic Imagination* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005), p110.

<sup>147</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p220-221. Her choice of missile is suggestively linked to Brooke's Indian background.

<sup>148</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p221.

<sup>149</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p245.

<sup>150</sup> Nora Foster Stovel, '(W)rites of Passage: The typescript of *The Diviners* as shadowtext' David Staines (Ed.) *Margaret Laurence: Critical Reflections* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2001), p114 (pp101-121).

marriage for the duration of the writing – she finally has a purpose, and a means of escape. But it is becoming clearer that the relationship with Brooke has to end, and ultimately, Morag can only liberate herself by reconnecting with her suppressed Manawaka past.

This process of reconnection begins with Prin's death, and Morag's trip home for the funeral. Returning to Brooke, she finds she can no longer tolerate his belittling of her, and finds herself expressing her anger in Christie's vibrant, blasphemous tones that are so wonderful to read they deserve quoting at length:

*'Little one.* Brooke, I am twenty-eight years old and I am five feet eight inches tall, which has always seemed too bloody christly tall to me but there you go and by judas priest and all the sodden saints in fucking Beulah Land, I am stuck with it and I do not *mind* like I did once, in fact the goddamn reverse if you really want to know, for I've gone against it long enough, and I'm no actress at heart, then, and that's the everlasting christly truth of it.'

<sup>151</sup>

This outburst, (received with another classic line from Brooke, who asks if she is due on her period) signals the beginning of the end for this stifling marriage. A further death-blow is struck when Morag, who after his lukewarm appraisal of her final draft did not tell Brooke she had submitted her novel for publication, is accepted by a publisher, and her work is printed under the name of Gunn rather than Skelton.<sup>152</sup> But ultimately, Morag still needs a fulcrum to help her break free, and it comes in the form of another blast from the Manawaka past: the return of Jules.

The unhappily married Morag runs into Jules on the street. They go back to her apartment for a drink, but when Brooke comes home and becomes racially abusive,

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<sup>151</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p256. Italics in original.

<sup>152</sup> As with Emily, the appearance of her name in print is a momentous occasion for Morag. But it is not 'perfect'; Emily is mortified by a misprint, and Morag dislikes the jacket design of her book. This shared sense of achievement tempered by disappointment seems to strike at the crux of what it means to have a literary career – the imagination is never satisfied, and there is always room for improvement and development with the next project.

Morag follows Jules back to his room. At this juncture, the reader is presented with three characters each as a potential personification of Canada's colonial history: Métis Jules, Scottish Morag, and the imperialist Brooke. Morag is seen as finally shaking off Brooke's authority, but what are the implications of this type of reading for her relationship with Jules? And, even more importantly to the narrative of the *Künstlerroman*, how do the repercussions of this change in her life affect her writing career? While Laurence has been praised for her treatment of Métis history in the Manawaka cycle, this is by no means a unanimous response. Terry Goldie accuses her of promoting Jules in a stereotypical role – the Other as the sexual mystic / plaything of the coloniser. He argues that in *The Diviners*, Jules's 'primary contribution is as incubus, with a very clear emphasis on his sexual power, but his mystical potency extends through other commodities as well, particularly orality and the prehistoric'.<sup>153</sup> Goldie's point here is that by associating Jules with sex and storytelling, Laurence falls victim to clichés and stereotypes. He feels that her over-emphasising these elements makes Jules an 'ethereal manifestation, an aura of indigenous presence rather than [...] material reality'.<sup>154</sup> Theoretically, the grounds for objection make sense – Jules's role within in *The Diviners* could potentially be summed up as Morag's supplier of orgasms and Métis folktales. However, to over-simplify to this extent would make all the characterisation appear ridiculous or clichéd, regardless of race, (for example, this reading depends on casting Brooke as a stereotypically reserved and restrictive Englishman) and Laurence's portrayal of Jules and Morag's relationship is a more subtle thing than Goldie is willing to acknowledge.

Laurence presents her characters as too self-aware to fall into these traps. Jules himself half-mockingly jokes to Morag that he is a sexual '*shaman*',<sup>155</sup> when she admits that she needed to sleep with him to sever her ties to Brooke. Her response makes it

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<sup>153</sup> Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literatures* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1989), p138.

<sup>154</sup> Goldie, *Fear and Temptation*, p138.

<sup>155</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p273. Italics in original.

clear that she was looking for a fulcrum rather than a guru: 'I never thought of it that way. But I know that whatever I'm going to do next, or wherever I go, it'll have to be on my own'.<sup>156</sup> The sexual and emotional connection between Morag and Jules, which will be resumed at intervals through the future, is presented as a mutual attraction, a meeting of equals who can understand and satisfy each other, rather than merely an illicit thrill for Morag:

They make love urgently, both equal to each other's body in this urgent meeting and grappling, this brief death of consciousness, this conscious defiance of death. Only at the final moment does Morag cry out [...] He holds her shoulders and her long hair, penetrating up into her until she knows he has reached whatever core of being she has. This time it is he who cries out.<sup>157</sup>

Of course, they are ultimately connected by more than sex and history: they have a daughter, Piquette Tonnerre Gunn, conceived in the aftermath of Morag's broken marriage. And crucially, it is while Morag is pregnant with Pique that she begins in earnest to write for a living – a period of dual genetic and artistic creativity, albeit driven by pragmatism as much as inspiration. Huf's model of the female *Künstlerroman* insisted that the female artist is faced with a stark choice when it comes to motherhood: 'she must choose between her sexuality and her profession, between her womanhood and her work'.<sup>158</sup> It is a stance echoed with depressing frequency, and it could certainly be seen to apply in *Who Do You Think You Are?*, when Rose decides that Patrick can provide a better, more stable home for their daughter. But Morag refuses to make this decision. She wants to be a mother *and* a writer.

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<sup>156</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p273.

<sup>157</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p342.

<sup>158</sup> Huf, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman*, p5.

Her relationship with Pique is frequently troubled, and the text is punctuated by challenges and confrontations between them, many arising from Pique's resentment of her unconventional upbringing: illegitimate, itinerant, and (once they settle in Canada) mixed-race in a predominantly Caucasian small town environment. While there is a certain amount of symbolic potential in Pique's background, it needs stressing that she is never idealised as a 'merging of two contrary elements in terms of Canadian identity'.<sup>159</sup> Still, she is nevertheless born into a new type of Canadian identity, with her own complex heritage to understand – and this is a process that must frequently exclude her mother. But there is a sense of progression to their relationship, culminating in a subtly underplayed moment of validation:

The hurts unwittingly inflicted upon Pique by her mother, by circumstances – Morag had agonized over these often enough [...] Yet Pique was not assigning any blame – that was not what it was all about. And Pique's journey, although at this point it might feel to her unique, was not unique.

Morag reached out and took Pique's hand, holding it lightly.<sup>160</sup>

Crucially, this moment takes place after Pique has sung a ballad of her own composition to Morag for the first time; in fact, far from being unique, Pique's journey can be explicitly linked to Morag's own – the text contains the potential for a second *Künstlerroman*, and uniquely within this study, signals that creativity and procreativity can be intrinsically entwined rather than mutually exclusive concepts. It is a rare flash of optimism in a textual landscape that is otherwise in danger of being overshadowed by Huf's twin assertions as to the incompatibility of a creative career with romantic relationships or family life. And yet despite the frequency with which Huf's observations are borne out by the texts' uninspiring male love-interest characters and the lack of detailed mother-child relationships, this does not amount to an insurmountable obstacle

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<sup>159</sup> Goldie, *Fear and Temptation*, p123.

<sup>160</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p441.

in the protagonists' path. They remain dedicated to their careers, and the final section of this chapter is dedicated to assessing their success as artists.

### Careers and Creative Success

Ultimately, however fascinating the characters' relationships, or intriguing their liaisons, the final test of the *Künstlerroman* is creative: does the protagonist become an artist or not? Does she sustain her commitment to her artistic ambitions, or do they fade from her as her life becomes ever more complicated? Is she successful in her chosen discipline, or does she prove lacking? These are not easy questions to answer; creative success is difficult to quantify, and harder to compare. It is a deeply subjective thing to measure, and I am aware that my reactions are unavoidably personal. Furthermore, the information needed exists beyond the texts of the narratives, and must be retrieved from their inner-textual frameworks – the careers in question are after all fictional, and dealt with in varying degrees of detail by the writers. Still, despite this, I feel it is not only possible but necessary to consider the texts in these terms, in order for them to be fully understood as *Künstlerroman* narratives.

In adulthood, Emily clearly fulfils her early potential. She is a natural and innately talented writer, who loves the process of creation, and is ecstatically absorbed when working on her ill-fated *Seller of Dreams*. Emily (ever the Romantic) is portrayed as dedicated, inspired, and absorbed in her art: 'Everything else was forgotten – for a time at least – in the subtle, all-embracing joy of creation [...] The characters came to life under her hand and swarmed through her consciousness, vivid, alluring, compelling'.<sup>161</sup> She finds her inspiration comes from within herself; a scene, a setting, or a chance remark may provide the initial spark, but her talent is creative and active, she develops her sources rather than reproducing them. For example, Emily is frequently irritated

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<sup>161</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p47. For more on this, see p273-275.



when her community insists that her characters are drawn from life: 'I never once even *thought* of Cousin Beulah when I wrote that story. And if I *had* thought of Cousin Beulah I most certainly wouldn't have put *her* in a story'.<sup>162</sup> Emily's originality contrasts tellingly with the defining feature of Teddy's creativity, which is his interminable reproduction of her face. Emily explicitly avoids portraiture but Teddy appears to know no other art form. Epperly insists this is testimony to their bond: Teddy's portrait *The Smiling Girl* is 'his own medium's *A Seller of Dreams*',<sup>163</sup> his tribute to Emily. Yet rather than recognising Emily as a fellow-artist, his portrayal of her reduces her from an active creator to a passive muse. Ilse's well intentioned question – 'What does it feel like, Emily, to realise yourself the inspiration of a genius?'<sup>164</sup> – exposes how completely Teddy's art has cast Emily in the conventionally female role of a muse, rather than recognising she is an artist in her own right. This refusal of Teddy's art to appreciate Emily's has led to Campbell's reading that Teddy 'actually *steals* or usurps Emily's creative talents, [he] not only draws his inspiration from Emily, it seems, but also *away* from her'.<sup>165</sup> While this theory perhaps suggests disturbing repercussions for Emily's writing after her eventual marriage, it cannot be lent too much authority within the text, where she continues to work.

Montgomery maintains a strong element of autobiography in her portrayal of Emily's career, having her protagonist settle into a comfortable and reasonably profitable routine of writing 'pot-boilers' for magazines. The serials provide her with security, but little real satisfaction, and her career appears somewhat stalled: 'She spent long hours at her desk and enjoyed her work after a fashion. But there was a little consciousness of failure under it all. She could never get much higher on the Alpine path. The glorious city of fulfilment on its summit was not for her.'<sup>166</sup> *A Seller of Dreams* is lost forever, and

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<sup>162</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p13. Italics in original.

<sup>163</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p187.

<sup>164</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p144.

<sup>165</sup> Campbell, 'Wedding Bells and Death Knells', p141. Italics in original.

<sup>166</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p149.

Emily never attempts to resurrect her brilliant first novel. But circumstances conspire to provide her with a second. She begins to tell stories to Aunt Elizabeth, in an effort to distract her during a painful convalescence, and finally wins approval and appreciation from her most formidable relative: 'I wouldn't mind hearing it. It kind of took my thoughts away from myself. The folks seemed – sort of – real to me. I suppose that is why I feel as if I want to know what happens to them'.<sup>167</sup> The story develops, not in a rush of inspiration like *A Seller of Dreams*, but slowly, almost organically. Nevertheless, the whole family becomes absorbed by the 'witty, sparkling rill of human comedy'.<sup>168</sup> If Emily can no longer dream up a fairy story, she has learned to craft believable characters that convince and entertain the most difficult audience. *The Moral of the Rose* appears to be the work of a maturing talent, less fanciful, but reflecting a depth of experience that could not have been behind the earlier work. Still, Montgomery resists making success too easy for Emily, and instead chooses to reflect the genuine difficulties faced by any would-be writer seeking publication. *The Moral of the Rose* is repeatedly rejected, and once more, Emily loses confidence. Unlike her creator, who continued to submit *Anne of Green Gables* until persistence finally paid off, Emily consigns her second novel to the shelf. It is only published thanks to the intervention of Cousin Jimmy.

This plot device has been heavily criticised. Pike asserts that in compromising Emily's confidence, Montgomery attempts to reassure her contemporary readers that writing is not incompatible with traditional femininity, complaining that 'it is not through the author's agency that the book gets published',<sup>169</sup> and reading Jimmy's actions as patronising: the young woman's efforts need the permission and intervention of the older man to succeed. Yet this interpretation neglects Jimmy's marginalisation from conventional masculinity, and overlooks his genuine awe for Emily's ability: 'How does

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<sup>167</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p143.

<sup>168</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p145.

<sup>169</sup> E. Holly Pike, 'The Heroine Who Writes and Her Creator', Mary Henley Rubio (Ed.), *Harvesting Thistles: The Textual Garden of L.M. Montgomery* (Guelph: Canadian Children's Press, 1994), p53 (pp50-57).

she do it? How *does* she do it! I can write poetry – but *this*. Those folks are alive!’<sup>170</sup> It is also worth remembering, when comparing the careers of character and creator, that Emily is barely twenty-four when *The Moral of the Rose* is published, while Montgomery had to wait until her early thirties for the success of *Anne of Green Gables*. In having Emily succeed so young, Montgomery manages at once to make her lack of confidence understandable, and her achievement all the more remarkable, as expressed through Janet Royal’s congratulatory letter:

You were right not to come to New York [...] You could never have written *The Moral of the Rose* here. Wild roses won’t grow in city streets. And your story is like a wild rose, dear, all sweetness and unexpectedness with sly little thorns of wit and satire [...] Emily Byrd Starr, where do you get your uncanny understanding of human nature...?<sup>171</sup>

The letter recognises Emily’s youth and talent, and furthermore, vindicates entirely her decision to remain at New Moon. It is both a wonderful accolade, and a testimony to her status as a Canadian writer.

Del is not as obviously successful as Emily, but Munro does explicitly present her development from a melodramatic daydreamer into a potentially talented writer. This happens in the epilogue ‘The Photographer’, where Del is officially established as a writer. The linearity of the narrative is once more disrupted, as Del reveals she has been working on a novel for years. Suddenly, her observations and recollections are given a new significance – there is the sense of a work in progress. Del explains how her fascination with a local scandal inspired the beginnings of a melodramatic Gothic novel. Even as she outlines her plot and characterization, we have the sense that she has already distanced herself from this project. There is a teasing, self aware edge to her tone when she describes the supernatural climax of her tale: ‘I had not worked out all the

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<sup>170</sup> Montgomery, *Emily’s Quest*, p147. Italics in original

<sup>171</sup> Montgomery, *Emily’s Quest*, p178. Italics in original

implications of this myself, but felt they were varied and powerful'.<sup>172</sup> Del initially delights in exorcising the real family from her narrative, replacing them with more romantic versions of themselves that are more suited to her vision of literature. She detaches her heroine, Caroline, from the woman whose tragedy inspires her: 'She came ready-made into my mind, taunting and secretive, blotting out altogether that pudgy Marion'.<sup>173</sup> But the most interesting figure in Del's fiction is that of the Photographer. He is the mysterious villain of the piece, who inflicts strange, unflattering images on his clients: 'The pictures he took turned out to be unusual, even frightening [...] Brides looked pregnant, children adenoidal'.<sup>174</sup> The Photographer does not record what is displayed to him, but he nevertheless records what is there, and this is how Del first conceives of herself as a writer – she believes that her particular brand of distorted reality contains the 'truth' about Jubilee: 'The main thing was that it seemed true to me, not real but true, as if I had discovered, not made up, such people and such a story, as if that town was lying close behind the one I walked through every day'.<sup>175</sup> This conception of the artist as commanding a special degree of perception is understandably appealing to Del's adolescent ego, and she relishes her supposed insight into her community.

This is one ideology of fiction, and it would establish Del as one type of writer, but Munro does not stop here. This, we infer, is a preliminary stage rather than the ultimate destination of Del's fiction. It takes an unexpected meeting with Bobby Sherriff, the shy son of the scandalous family she has been novelizing, to jolt Del out of this conception of fiction. As she converses with the mildly eccentric and innocent Bobby, Del realises that her interest lies in the real human story rather than her exaggerated transformation of it: 'And what happened, I asked myself, to Marion? Not to Caroline.

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<sup>172</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p243.

<sup>173</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p242.

<sup>174</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p243.

<sup>175</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p244.

*What happened to Marion?*'.<sup>176</sup> At this moment of insight, Del's perspective shifts from this moment of her youth to an older, retrospective understanding. There is a rueful note to the narrative voice, as the grown-up Del explains how she will change, how she will eventually 'be so greedy for Jubilee'<sup>177</sup> and the lives of its inhabitants that she will obsessively record its geography, its sociology, its myths and traditions, and how this will never be enough to completely explain what motivates and moves the lives of people living there: 'And no list could hold what I wanted, for what I wanted was every last thing, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together – radiant, everlasting.'<sup>178</sup> In concluding *Lives of Girls and Women* with this interaction of time and perspective, with this vision of Del's future career, Munro achieves the final fusion of form and content. If our reading has been driven by questions about identity and writing, about how Del can become an author, and what kind of fiction she will write, then as Coral Ann Howells notes 'the answers are already written into the text we have just finished reading, although they are only provisional and necessarily incomplete'.<sup>179</sup> In other words, *Lives of Girls and Women* provides a *Künstlerroman* that goes beyond the plotline of the collection, and is instead written into its very existence.

There is a similar tactic at work in *Who Do You Think You Are?*. While Rose is working on a soap opera she learns by chance that her former lover Simon has died of cancer, and is abruptly confronted with the disparity between the plot of the soap and the plot of her life:

People watching trusted that they would be protected from predictable disasters, also from those shifts of emphasis that throw the story line open to

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<sup>176</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p247. Italics in original.

<sup>177</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p249.

<sup>178</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p249.

<sup>179</sup> Coral Ann Howells, *Alice Munro: Contemporary World Writers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p50.

question, the disarrangements which demand new judgments and solutions,  
and throw the windows open on inappropriate unforgettable scenery.<sup>180</sup>

As with *Lives of Girls and Women*, this appears as one of those moments when Munro is inscribing her vision of fiction into its very text. Her whole style of writing is driven by those precise 'shifts of emphasis', those 'disarrangements'. Yet as Osmond points out, this acknowledgment of how life can resist patterns does not compromise the patterns that are an essential component of fiction – as ever, there is a balancing act at work: 'No matter how great the insistence on the inexplicable nature of events themselves, the desire to search them for some kind of meaning, even if it is only a subjective meaning, keeps popping up'.<sup>181</sup>

It is perhaps this desire to find meaning that Munro indulges in her reader, by returning to Hanratty for the final stories of the collection, 'Spelling' and 'Who Do You Think You Are?'. And as if to complete the sense of a return, 'Spelling' sees the relationship between Flo and Rose once more placed firmly centre stage. Flo is now an elderly woman, beginning to suffer from dementia, and Brian and Rose have to make the decision to move her to an old people's home. The title of the story refers to a dialogue Rose engages in with another resident, an old woman who communicates by spelling out words: 'without prompting came another. "Forest. F-O-R-E-S-T." "Celebrate," said Rose suddenly. "C-E-L-E-B-R-A-T-E"'.<sup>182</sup> The choice of word is clearly significant; Rose is able to perceive how the woman's continued grasp of language is somehow empowering and humanizing. What could be a moment of pathos still manages to contain a measure of strength. And this balance is also essential in the characterization of Flo. Rose and Flo have reached the inevitable reversal of role that comes with age, and

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<sup>180</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p177.

<sup>181</sup> Rosalie Osmond, 'Arrangements, Disarrangements and Earnest Deceptions', Coral Ann Howells & Lynette Hunter (Eds.) *Narrative Strategies in Canadian Literature* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1991), p85 (pp82-92).

<sup>182</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p187.

Rose displays a new appreciation of Flo's personality, a new understanding of her situation, however different it remains from her own. For the first time, we see Rose hesitate to incorporate Flo into her dramatic narrative:

It wasn't that she thought how shabby it was, to be exposing and making fun of Flo this way. She had done it often enough before; it was no news to her that it was shabby. What stopped her was, in fact, that gulf; she had a fresh and overwhelming realization of it, and it was nothing to laugh about.<sup>183</sup>

This story contains many references to Rose's acting career; she appears in a play about the Trojans and she receives an award. She is established more clearly than ever as a successful professional actress. She is also re-established as part of her family, with her history and her community providing both a sense of how far she has moved on whilst also confirming how her direction was influenced and established during her early life.

This balance is explored further in the final story, 'Who Do You Think You Are?'. This story does not act as an obvious epilogue in the way that 'The Photographer' does in *Lives of Girls and Women* but it still offers the same sense of past and present in precarious unity: 'as it develops, the story becomes precisely a statement of Rose's position in relation to her past [...] Focused on issues of identity, this story constructs a concept of self which, though it evades definition, may be located in relationship to community'.<sup>184</sup> Rose's recollections send her back to the classroom, where she is once again confronted by the question that drives the collection: 'Who do you think you are?'.<sup>185</sup> Rose relives a childhood alliance with a boy from her class at school, Ralph Gillespie. He seems to be one of the first people who prompts her into performance; he imitates the local eccentric Milton Homer, and she later imitates *his* impression to amuse her brother and sister-in-law. Ralph seems to somehow inspire Rose: 'She wanted to do

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<sup>183</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p190.

<sup>184</sup> Howells, *Alice Munro*, p64.

<sup>185</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p200.

the same [...] She wanted to fill up in that magical, releasing way, transform herself; she wanted the courage and the power'.<sup>186</sup> Ralph and Rose share an unspoken connection that is still apparent during their brief meeting as adults, and Rose demonstrates her own brand of loyalty to his memory by keeping this connection secret: 'Rose didn't tell this to anybody, glad that there was one thing at least she wouldn't spoil by telling'.<sup>187</sup>

There are no obvious answers to that driving question 'who do you think you are?', but by locating the question with Rose's relationship with her past, Munro highlights the significance of Rose's final silence, her pact with Ralph's memory. Howells suggests that this pact is linked to Rose's insecurities about her acting, and that these in turn are linked to Munro's questions about her writing: 'The thing she was ashamed of, in acting, was that she might have been paying attention to the wrong things, reporting antics, when there was always something further, a tone, a depth, a light, that she couldn't and wouldn't get'.<sup>188</sup> There are striking similarities between this statement, and Del's manifesto for fiction that concludes *Lives of Girls and Women*, although this has little of Del's optimism. In this second treatment of the *Künstlerroman*, Munro is engaged in highlighting not the reasons that might motivate a creative career, but the inevitable compromises and complexities of negotiating life with art. Howells points out that: 'These stories told by Flo and Rose – and by Munro – all attempt to 'translate' reality into fiction'.<sup>189</sup> What *Who Do You Think You Are?* achieves is to point out the difficulty of this translation, even as it is accomplished, not by offering a 'concrete' version of reality in fiction, but in acknowledging and exploring the many ways in which such endeavours are intrinsically flawed.

Finally, there is Morag's career to consider, and perhaps fittingly, it is the most successful. When Morag first appears to the reader, she is already an established artist of

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<sup>186</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p205.

<sup>187</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p210.

<sup>188</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p209.

<sup>189</sup> Howells, *Alice Munro*, p66.



considerable reputation, and close to the completion of her latest – it is hinted her last – novel. This is a striking departure from the traditional *Künstlerroman* plot, removing the most obvious element of suspense (will this character succeed?) and replacing it with a myriad of other, subtler elements. Apart from anything else, this timeframe removes once and for all the idea that once the artist has achieved success, they have also achieved a state of idyllic peace, confidence and happiness. Morag is seen reflecting on this after a stranger calls and pesters her for advice as to how to get published: ‘The woman only wanted to find out. Desperate, likely. Wanting the golden key from someone who had had five books published and who frequently wondered how to keep the mini-fortress here going and what would happen to her when she could no longer write. Golden key indeed.’<sup>190</sup> For Morag, writing is about *work*. It is a physical and mental labour, and she views the fruits of her labour with mixed feelings. Her first novel, *Spear of Innocence*, occupies the most space within the text of *The Diviners* – the plot and the process of writing are placed centre stage. It tells the story of Lilac Stonehouse, an innocently promiscuous small-town girl who moves to the big city. As Morag admits, ‘An old story, but in this case (hopefully) somewhat different, because Lilac’s staggering naïveté is never presented as anything but harmful, and in fact it damages not only herself but others’.<sup>191</sup> The novel itself receives mixed reviews, and the reader senses an edge of amusement in Laurence’s presentation of this side of being a professional writer, with the humour targeted both at Morag and the critics. It is variously branded ‘A tale of a primitive lumber town’, ‘A piquant and exciting novel about abortion’, ‘A dreary novel about – yawn – a goodhearted tart’.<sup>192</sup> Morag is perplexed: ‘Some of them do not appear to refer

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<sup>190</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p25.

<sup>191</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p225.

<sup>192</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p262.

to the novel Morag wrote at all, and this is true even of some of the favorable ones. So she cannot believe even the few comments she would like to believe'.<sup>193</sup>

Her next novel is *Prospero's Child*, and although the writing of it takes place off-stage, her letter to Ella outlines the plot of the young woman, the child of the title:

[w]ho marries His Excellency, the Governor of some island in some ocean very far south, and who virtually worships him and then who has to go to the opposite extreme and reject nearly everything about him, at least for a time, in order to become her own person. It's as much the story of H.E.<sup>194</sup>

Created after the collapse of Morag's marriage, it is difficult not to view the text as a re-working of her own experiences. But while the initial symbolism seems to place Brooke in the Prospero role, with Morag as his sheltered and infantilised Miranda, this is ultimately an inadequate casting. Morag is claiming the Prospero persona for herself. A mark of this developing confidence in her own success as a creator comes when Laurence once more includes some of the reviews in the text. Morag will never *not* care what is said, but she is slowly learning that trying to please everyone is a 'comic-opera desire'.<sup>195</sup> The contradictory clamour of the reviews is, at best, unhelpful.

While Morag's writing career remains central, from this point in, Laurence provides less and less detail about what Morag writes. The reader learns in passing that she publishes a collection of short stories, *Presences*, with no further information about the content of them. There is a little more information given about the plot of her next novel, *Jonah*, but with nothing like the intensity of feeling that accompanies the writing of *Spear of Innocence*. *Jonah* is followed by the even more enigmatic *Shadow of Eden*, which is apparently her 'best thus far',<sup>196</sup> but nothing else is revealed. Morag is increasingly successful, but strangely impervious to this. Laurence stops including any of the reviews

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<sup>193</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p330.

<sup>194</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p330.

<sup>195</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p332.

<sup>196</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p414.

in the text, and it is increasingly clear that Morag can only measure her success in terms of her personal satisfaction with the work, rather than from external sources. She is not presented as arrogant, or above critical opinion, but she is her own harshest critic and the only standards that she trusts are her own. Again, the emphasis is on writing as *work*, a task that supports her life, whilst also intruding into it: 'How to get this novel written, in between or as well as everything else?'.<sup>197</sup> Yet towards the text's conclusion, there is an increasing sense of acceptance and confidence as Morag moves through a period of writer's block and comes out on the other side: '[she] returned to the house to write the remaining private and fictional words, and to set down her title'.<sup>198</sup> As with Del in *Lives of Girls and Women*, there is the suggestion that the author and the protagonist are engaged in the same creative process; that the narrative reflects the character and the text of the novel is an echo or a manifestation of a text within the novel.

The effect of this, as Stovel has insightfully pointed out, is to create a sense of 'shadow text' that runs alongside the actual text of *The Diviners*.<sup>199</sup> She suggests that the reasons for this are as much practical as theoretically significant; *The Diviners* as published is a vast and complex novel, but Laurence's original draft was even more so and was extensively edited before publication, both by Laurence herself and by her editor Judith Jones. As previously noted, many of the material cut 'belonged' to Morag – including the full text of her first short story 'Wild Roses'. It is difficult to know what to do with this information, as one can only really respond to the text as published, but the knowledge of an alternative *The Diviners* that incorporates more of Morag's creative voice is deeply intriguing idea, that, as Stovel notes, 'haunts'<sup>200</sup> the text thereafter. Indeed, this could be read as Laurence's crowning achievement in *The Diviners*, in that not only did she create

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<sup>197</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p366.

<sup>198</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p453.

<sup>199</sup> Stovel, '(W)rites of Passage', p115.

<sup>200</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p115.

an ambitious portrait of a talented artist, but she leaves her readers longing for the ‘work’ of this creation.

Perhaps, in the final analysis, this is the true measure of the *Künstlerroman*’s success; not merely how her potential matures in adult life and withstands the challenges and complications of relationships and family life, but whether or not the protagonist’s career generates the same interest felt in that of her creator; whether or not she emerges as a convincing enough artist to sustain the fiction of her art. And the measure of this can be assessed in the following and final chapter, as the study progresses from a survey of characterisation and development, and considers the narratives against a more literary, metafictional framework of Gothic influences and sensibilities.

## *Chapter Four*

### *Constructing a Canadian Gothic: Gender and Genre in the Künstlerroman*

*It was a lot like one of my standard Costume Gothics, but a Gothic gone wrong. It was upside-down somehow. There were the sufferings, the hero in the mask of a villain, the villain in the mask of a hero, the flights, the looming death, the sense of being imprisoned, but there was no happy ending, no true love.*

*~ Margaret Atwood*

## Introduction

The associative potential of the word 'Gothic' is as diverse and duplicitous as the canon of literature that is perceived as embodying it; it is a word that incorporates extremes of ancient history and contemporary culture, and it is therefore imperative that in places where this complexity cannot be explained, it is at the very least acknowledged. This chapter is such a place, a site of contact where the Canadian female *Künstlerroman* is considered in relationship to one of its most exciting and troubling generic forms, and so this introduction begins with an interrogation of the term 'Gothic' itself, before moving on to consider the Gothic in terms of Canadian literature, and finally to briefly chart the relationship between genre and gender when reading the Gothic in a specifically female context. Margot Northey has suggested the first step of this process is to separate the literary usage of the word from its socio-historical connotations: 'With the passage of time, words often gather a variety of associations so that the original precision of meaning is diffused or lost. Occasionally a literary word begins to be useful as a critical term at the same time it ceases to be useful as a historical term. Such is the case with 'gothic'.<sup>1</sup> Still, even when considered solely as a term of literary criticism, the Gothic still encompasses a vast and varied body of work. Northey suggests that this can be dealt with through incorporation: 'a working definition of the gothic must encompass the variations in its use and be applicable to contemporary gothic writing as well as to the old eighteenth-century English and European novels'.<sup>2</sup> But while the development of a 'working definition' that allows for functional discussion without critical precision is essential to this chapter, I would posit that it can only be implemented through recognising the immense scope of Gothic literature, and understanding the differences between 'contemporary gothic writing [and] old eighteenth-century English and

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<sup>1</sup> Margot Northey, *The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic & Grotesque in Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Northey, *The Haunted Wilderness*, p6.

European novels' rather than run the risk of suggesting these different manifestations of the Gothic are ultimately interchangeable. This introduction will outline my understanding of four key concepts in relation to gothic fiction – classic, parody, grotesque and contemporary – and while it cannot claim to offer a comprehensive analysis, it will establish a functional and coherent vocabulary of the Gothic for the purposes of the chapter.

The conventional starting point for any discussion of Gothic literature is the 1764 publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. Walpole distanced himself from the novel by presenting it as a fifteenth-century manuscript, and hid behind the pseudonym of the 'translator' William Marshall. This was a common device in eighteenth-century fiction, but especially appropriate as the beginning of a genre so inherently associated with subterfuge, deception and illicit desires. *The Castle of Otranto* epitomises the 'classic' Gothic and initiates both the character types and the thematic concerns that dominated this stage in the genre's development:

[T]he conflation of villain and hero in the brooding figure [...] who is subject to outbursts of rage and violence [...] the focus on victimised but often defiant women threatened with rape and incest; and the use of confined spaces – castles, dungeons, monasteries, and prisons – to symbolize extreme emotional states through labyrinthine images of confinement, burial and incarceration.<sup>3</sup>

Other notable texts that can be read as classic Gothic include Matthew Gregory Lewis's salacious *The Monk* (1796), William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786) and, of course, the works of Ann Radcliffe, including *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797). These texts have retained an almost constant critical interest, but in this respect they are very much in the minority. Indeed, there exists a plethora of texts

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Schellinger (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Novel* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998) p483.

from this period which support Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's arch assertion that 'most Gothic novels are not worth reading'.<sup>4</sup> But while a degree of excess is always implied when I refer to 'classic Gothic' it is also worth noting that even the most archetypal texts in this tradition have their moments of subtlety; for example, despite its rip-roaring, bodice-ripping reputation, *The Castle of Otranto* is also drily rational, with recognisably eighteenth-century moral values. Nevertheless, for better or worse, classic eighteenth-century Gothic is generally perceived as excessive and melodramatic, with its eerily exotic locations and mustachio-twirling villains, and this tendency was quickly exploited for comedic purposes by the following generation of Gothic writers.

Texts like Eaton Stannard Barrett's *The Heroine* (1813), Thomas Love Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) and most notoriously Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818), sharply undermined the excesses and extremes of the classic Gothic. Of course, not all these texts were aimed at the same targets, or utilised the same tactics, but they do tend to share a sense of playful engagement with cliché, that occasionally masks a more serious literary or social agenda. Therefore, when I refer to 'Gothic parody', it is in light of this type of text, that is arch without being frivolous, and engages with the same conventions that it subverts. It is perhaps the complexity of many Gothic parodies that has explained the resilience of the genre: very few of these texts could be located as completely 'anti-Gothic'. Instead, the Gothic adjusted and mutated in partial response, with one of its most prevalent manifestations being especially pertinent to this chapter; the Gothic as grotesque. Works such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853) develop classical Gothic conventions in an altogether more corporeal context, with an emphasis on the physically repulsive as well as the psychologically threatening. Once more though, the borders between different categorisations of the Gothic are aptly instable and subject to distortion. As Northey

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<sup>4</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (London: Methuen, 1976), p3.



notes, the classical and the grotesque strands share many of the same roots, with the grotesque also including some elements of parody: '[b]oth terms involve a subjective and often symbolic vision of experience which invokes feelings of fear or horror, although the grotesque may frequently have a comic side as well'.<sup>5</sup> The persistent degree of cohesion is a reminder that the Gothic's rhizomatic qualities can form connections across all periods and subgenres.

This developing sense of multiplicity and overlap becomes especially important when considering contemporary manifestations of the Gothic – a capacious label that can be applied to all the texts considered in this study. These are texts that have an accumulative literary awareness; they are written from a vantage point where previous manifestations of the Gothic can be acknowledged, mimicked and deliberately alluded to. For example, Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) 'offers one of the most significant rewritings of the traditional myth since it was established by Bram Stoker in *Dracula*'<sup>6</sup> and draws upon the canon of vampire mythology to disarm and disconcert the reader. Traditional tropes are abandoned: Rice's vampires can hang crucifixes about their necks and contemplate the effect in their mirrors. More disturbingly, the narrative perspective invites the reader to empathize with the vampire 'transforming the monster into a site of identification'<sup>7</sup> and subverting the traditional Gothic status quo through an act of transgressive sympathy. This theme of transgression is central to contemporary Gothic, but is not just limited to a reversal of sympathy. It can also be seen at work in the reallocation of narrative control. For example, in Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* (2002) the plot is heavily inspired by Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1860) but the heterosexual romance narrative is destabilised through the explicit expression of homosexual desire, and a previously suppressed voice is granted influence and priority. Contemporary

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<sup>5</sup> Northey, *The Haunted Wilderness*, p8.

<sup>6</sup> David Punter & Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p244.

<sup>7</sup> Punter & Byron, *The Gothic*, p247.

Gothic can thus be understood not only by its literary awareness and knowledge but by what it *does* with that knowledge, and how it uses its own Gothic connotations to disrupt expectation and subvert the anticipated narrative.

However, while this discussion has so far established a working vocabulary of Gothic literature, it has done so only in terms of European and American texts. It is therefore essential to focus now on how the Gothic genre has appeared in Canadian literature, and to ascertain the distinctive features of Canadian Gothic. In my earlier consideration of Canadian literary identity certain terms and ideas persistently emerged – instability, challenge, repression, rebellion, anxiety and fluidity – and with those words in mind, it is perhaps not surprising that Canadian literature should have a certain predisposition towards the Gothic genre. Justin D. Edwards has remarked that this reflects the complexities of Canadian national identity, ‘gothicism is woven into a local history to disrupt a previously established sense of identity’,<sup>8</sup> suggesting that the Gothic strain in the country’s psyche is a reaction to the challenges of establishing what it means to be Canadian. If one accepts Robert Kroetsch’s proposal that ‘Canadians cannot agree on what their metanarrative is’,<sup>9</sup> there is at least a case to be made in arguing they have chosen their genre. Canadian Gothic literature is thus a culturally embedded response to a national crisis of identity: ‘Gothic discourse in Canada arises out of a language of terror, panic and anxiety [...] It is a language that articulates, or simply gestures towards, deeply buried anxieties’.<sup>10</sup> However, there is more to the Gothic element of Canadian literary identity than the basic expression of fear and cultural anxiety: ‘The very energy of much gothic and grotesque fiction supports a connection with cultural vitality as much as with cultural mortality. This being the case, those works studied which appear so death-ridden

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<sup>8</sup> Justin D. Edwards, *Gothic Canada: Reading the Spectre of a National Literature* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005), pxiii.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Kroetsch, ‘Disunity as Unity: A Canadian Strategy’, Robert Kroetsch (Ed.) *The Lovely Treachery of Words: Essays Selected and New* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p27 (pp21-33).

<sup>10</sup> Edwards, *Gothic Canada*, pxvii.

and frequently disintegrative may indeed be considered catalysts of regeneration.<sup>11</sup> The Gothic is therefore a tool as well as a vent, and a device for understanding and reconciling cultural angst as well as an established framework within which to express it.

This Gothic sensibility in Canadian culture is reflected by a rich literary tradition. Arguably beginning with John Richardson's *Wacousta* (1832), the Canadian Gothic novel has appeared in countless guises, and enjoyed both critical and popular attention. The genre exerts a powerful fascination, and has been explored by a diverse range of writers, from the classically Gothic sensibilities of Susanna Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852) to the grotesque irreverence of Susan Swan's *The Wives of Bath* (1993). As Northey notes of the genre's cultural capital: 'the Canadian writers who have chosen gothic modes are not isolated or idiosyncratic [...] Moreover, its persistence is matched by its diversity'.<sup>12</sup> But while the Canadian Gothic may be characterised by diversity, it also demonstrates again the gendered dynamic of Canadian literary identity as the majority of Canadian Gothic's seminal works are written by women.<sup>13</sup> This not only emphasises the sense of female dominance in Canadian literature, but reiterates that the Gothic is also a gendered genre, with a long and prolific association with women writers.

This intersection of two major themes to this chapter – the convergence of gender and genre in Gothic fiction – is deeply multifarious; a spaghetti junction rather than a crossroads. It can be located (and endlessly relocated) in three chief sites of contact: the authors, the protagonists and the audience. One can make a compelling case in support of the Gothic as being primarily written *by* women, *about* women, and *for* women. Of course, this is not always unproblematic, even when putting aside for now the many male practitioners of the art. The tradition of women as reading and writing the

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<sup>11</sup> Northey, *The Haunted Wilderness*, p110.

<sup>12</sup> Northey, *The Haunted Wilderness*, p108.

<sup>13</sup> Twentieth-century examples include Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* (1925) Marie-Claire Blais's *Mad Shadows* (1959), Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* (1959), Anne Hébert's *Kamouraska* (1970) and Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996).

Gothic genre has disproportionately contributed to its historical disreputability, as biting observed by Austen: ‘And what are you reading, Miss – ?’ ‘Oh! It is only a novel!’ replies the young lady; while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame. – ‘It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda’.<sup>14</sup> The sex of the imagined reader and the choice of literary examples make it clear that this is an issue of gender as well as culture, and that novels – especially Gothic novels – were perceived as a female malaise. Indeed, they were also cited as psychologically infectious, afflicting young women with the most unsuitable thoughts and desires that could even lead to physical consequences:

Woman, with her exalted spiritualism, is more forcibly under the control of matter; her sensations are more vivid and acute, her sympathies more irresistible. She is less under the influence of the brain than the uterine system [...] in her, a hysteric predisposition is incessantly predominating from the dawn of puberty.<sup>15</sup>

With such dire warnings in mind, it is hardly then surprising that in the *Emily* trilogy, Aunt Elizabeth forbids her niece to read novels – and that prior to this prohibition, Emily has been specifically indulging in the Gothic: ‘She had read “The Mysteries of Udolpho” and “The Romance of the Forest” before the taboo had fallen on Dr. Burnley’s bookcase’.<sup>16</sup>

And yet, just as the Canadian Gothic can be seen as a constructive forum in which to resolve cultural angst as well as a means to merely express it, so too can the relationship between women and Gothic fiction be understood in a more positive light than this legacy of repression would first suggest. As E.J. Clery perceives when considering the first generation of female Gothic writers, there was ‘a sense of

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<sup>14</sup> Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p24.

<sup>15</sup> J.G. Millingen, *The Passions; or Mind and Matter. Illustrated by Considerations on Hereditary Insanity* (London: J. & D. Darling, 1848), p157.

<sup>16</sup> L.M. Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon* (New York: Random House, 2003), p238.

excitement, audacity and opportunism which accompanied the opening up of a new field of literary endeavour'<sup>17</sup> and the strong and successful tradition of women writing (and reading) Gothic fictions testifies to the resilience of those sentiments. The Gothic has a well deserved reputation as a means in which taboo subjects – death, female sexuality, incest, abuse – can be explored and explained, but this frequently coded and shadowy component to the texts is often accompanied by bold and frank challenges to established social norms. 'Gothic literature sees women writers at their most pushy and argumentative'<sup>18</sup> Clery remarks, in a rare and welcome complimentary usage of those maligned adjectives. Furthermore, participation in the Gothic 'gave women the confidence to experiment, attempt large effects, fly in the face of critical opinion, openly rival and emulate the achievements of their male peers'.<sup>19</sup> And so another aspect of the Gothic is typified by tension – between repression and expression, freedom and formula – and the relationship between gender and genre is as contradictory and intricate as the genre itself.

This chapter could not, and does not, propose to resolve these complexities. Instead, they are to be acknowledged as inherent, while the different aspects of the Gothic that have been outlined here – history, nation and gender – are brought together into a consideration of how this interplay influences the Canadian female *Künstlerroman*. Firstly, the different methods with which the writers approach Gothic conventions will be scrutinised, as this initial approach is repeatedly characterised by a literary self-awareness that engenders a sense of parody within their texts. I propose that this is the first stage of a two-step Gothic regeneration; that the writers must first interact with and infiltrate classical tropes, before reworking them and re-conceptualising the Gothic in a twentieth-century Canadian context. This process of regeneration will be examined in the

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<sup>17</sup> E.J. Clery, *Women's Gothic from Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley* (Gateshead: Athenaeum Press, 2004), p3.

<sup>18</sup> Clery, *Women's Gothic*, p3.

<sup>19</sup> Clery, *Women's Gothic*, p3.

second part of the chapter, which evaluates the writers' differing approaches when constructing Gothic narratives in a contemporary, Canadian context. Their methods are further analysed in a 'case-study', as the chapter turns to the Gothic treatment of masculinity within the texts, and reveals how, in a fittingly contradictory fashion, the relationship between the Gothic and the Canadian female *Künstlerroman* runs deepest and darkest in the presentation of the male characters, and their impact on the protagonists' lives and careers. Finally I address how this all impacts upon the texts as *Künstlerroman*, and how the protagonists are located in relation to the reading – and writing – of Gothic literature.

### Conceptualising the Canadian Gothic – Stage One: Subversion

Initially, it is striking how frequently all three writers approach the Gothic with a self-consciousness that ranges in tone from the cynical to the playful. Classically Gothic tropes and traditions are challenged, undermined, used either for comic effect, or to establish a crucial difference between the realms of 'fiction' and 'reality' within the texts. As Claudia L. Johnson has observed, 'urbane self-parody is itself already a significant part of mainstream gothic tradition'<sup>20</sup> and even such Gothic stalwarts as Matthew Lewis and Ann Radcliffe have their moments of 'deadpan' and 'camp', and 'make fun out the excessiveness of their violence'.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the suggestion of parody that is present throughout the texts should not be simplistically read as 'anti-Gothic'. Rather, this self-consciousness is crucial to understanding how these texts operate, and to appreciating that this is a new type of Gothic, that simultaneously extends the genre. In treating Gothic conventions with self-referential humour, or wry cynicism, the writers are able to utilise clichés without being clichéd, they are able to exploit readers' expectations whilst

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<sup>20</sup> Claudia L. Johnson, 'Introduction', Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pxii.

<sup>21</sup> Johnson, 'Introduction', pxii – xiii.

also sharing a frame of reference, and through challenging or dismantling existing narrative structures, they engage with the process of re-building a version of the Gothic that is explicitly twentieth-century Canadian.

This sense of subversion and parodying the classic Gothic is immediately apparent when considering L.M. Montgomery. The first major instance of this in the *Emily* trilogy is one of the most commented upon and analysed in the whole canon of Montgomery criticism – as I have already shown.<sup>22</sup> However, its significance is such that it is now imperative to return to it once more. It is, of course, the moment in *Emily of New Moon* when Aunt Elizabeth punishes Emily by locking her in the spare room. Previously, I have discussed this in terms of Montgomery characterising Emily as a Canadian girl, who breaks out of the domestic establishment, and escapes into the wilderness. And of course, it is also a key episode in reading the *Emily* trilogy as a re-working of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. But it is also worth noting now the suggestion of Gothic parody that further flavours this complex and crucial point in the narrative.

When Jane is locked in the Red Room, she is driven desperate with terror, and convinces herself that she balances on the precipice of a supernatural realm; 'fearful lest any sign of violent grief might waken a preternatural voice [...] or elicit from the gloom some haloed face'.<sup>23</sup> Her fear is intensely psychosomatic – she is so overwhelmed that she is physically stricken: 'My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings; something seemed near me; I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down; I rushed to the door and shook the lock in desperate effort'.<sup>24</sup> Jane collapses, suffers fits, and seems in danger for her life. Although the word itself remains implicit, the spectre of hysteria is nevertheless chillingly evoked, and so of course are the themes of female insanity and repression that are inevitably associated

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<sup>22</sup> For more on this, see p71-72 and p149.

<sup>23</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p18.

<sup>24</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p19.

with it. Sally Shuttleworth has identified Jane with, 'the two figures from the discourse of Victorian psychiatry who demarcated the sphere of excess: the passionate child and madwoman',<sup>25</sup> and pointed out how Jane's early rebelliousness initiates her later association with Bertha. The figure of the hysterical heroine is weak, victimised and vulnerable.<sup>26</sup> And it is therefore essential that, at this point in the narrative, Montgomery rejects this figure and displays Emily in a far more active and assertive role. Emily is at first every bit as terrified as Jane, but she makes a far greater effort to control her fear: 'She felt that she was going to scream again, but she fought the impulse down. A Starr must not be a coward'.<sup>27</sup> Although Emily's escape could be read as a 'happy accident' – Jimmy having so conveniently left the ladder against the wall – it still takes active courage to climb out the window and ignore 'the shakiness of the rotten rungs'.<sup>28</sup> In this episode, Montgomery's rejection is not of the Gothic per se, but it establishes Emily as a self-sufficient girl who does not have to wait to be rescued. Furthermore, Emily's resourcefulness is rewarded threefold – with the elation of escape, with the meeting that begins her friendship with Ilse, and with the avoidance of any further punishment.

However, the balance of parody and subversion is shifted somewhat in the next episode to consider, when Emily believes herself to have eaten a poisoned apple. Montgomery plays out the following drama, which has the symbolically saturated chapter title 'A Daughter of Eve', with full romantic gusto. Emily takes a last look at her face in the mirror, 'her reflection, amid the sleek, black flow of her hair [...] Oh, she was pale as the dead already. Yes, that was a dying face – there could be no doubt of it'.<sup>29</sup> She gathers up her courage to meet death bravely, pens one last epistle to Ilse – and then is promptly and prosaically 'cured' by the arrival of her Aunts, and their twin remedies of

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<sup>25</sup> Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p153.

<sup>26</sup> For more on the figure of the hysteric in Victorian culture, see Shuttleworth, p88-94.

<sup>27</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p111.

<sup>28</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p112.

<sup>29</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p136.



commonsense and mustard-and-water. In some respects it is a very odd episode – neither really amusing nor alarming – and is perhaps best read as Montgomery’s luring the reader into a false sense of security around Gothic tropes, before Emily visits her Aunt Nancy at Wyther Grange. For, if previously Montgomery has flirted with Gothic tropes and traditions, at Wyther Grange, the flirtation blossoms into a full-fledged affair. Yet the use of melodramatic convention is juxtaposed with very real dangers: the fall from the cliff, and the introduction of the fascinating Dean Priest, as well as the distressing scandal of Ilse’s mother. This juxtaposition of playful intertextuality and genuine peril heightens the force of both elements: Elizabeth Epperly has it that ‘[t]he Gothic allusions remind us of artifice, and then Montgomery’s narrator introduces us first to the shattering and then to the agonizingly real’.<sup>30</sup> However, Epperly’s reading relies on constraining the Gothic to the ‘artifice’ of the dangers Emily imagines, when in actuality it permeates every danger she encounters. We are reassured that Emily can only be hurt by her own imagination – and then that reassurance is swiftly snatched away – and the entire process is characterised by a Gothic sensibility.

Emily herself has her first impressions of Wyther Grange informed by her illicit reading: ‘Emily felt like one of the heroines in Gothic romance, wandering at midnight through a subterranean dungeon’.<sup>31</sup> But her night of terror ultimately invokes *Northanger Abbey* rather than *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. However, there is the potential to read the episode as more than parody. Irene Gammel offers the interpretation that the text is a ‘complex literary cryptogram for menstrual symptoms, depicted in Emily’s striking bodily responses: cold perspiration, anxiety, terror, horror, panic, and a none-too-subtle Gothic

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<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass: L.M. Montgomery’s Heroines and the Pursuit of Romance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p160.

<sup>31</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p238.

vision of a bleeding nun'.<sup>32</sup> Her imminent encounters with death and scandal will soon alter Emily's innocent view of the world: perhaps it is only fitting that this is preceded by her physical initiation into adolescence. This initiation is presided over by the suitably crone-like figures of Great Aunt Nancy and her familiar (in every sense of the word) Caroline. They repeat the genetic résumé of her features with an avidly sexualised twist: 'you're not a beauty but if you learn to use your eyes and hands and feet properly you'll pass for one. The men are easily fooled'.<sup>33</sup> Emily is embarrassed, yet intrigued, and makes the most of their liberal regime; sleeping in her own bed; getting up in the night to write poetry; reading any book she likes (except those from the presumably sexually explicit collection on the top shelf); and listening unchecked to adult conversation. '[Aunt Nancy] and Caroline talk a great deal to each other about things that happened in the Priest and Murray families. I like to sit and listen. They don't stop just as things are getting interesting the way Aunt Elizabeth and Aunt Laura do.'<sup>34</sup> This comes to a bitter climax when Emily overhears their version of what happened to Ilse's mother. Their salacious attitude appals her, and she is deeply hurt by her new burden of knowledge, which leaves her instantly older, sadder, and more complicated.

But while throughout Montgomery's more playful interactions with Gothic traditions, the beautiful, sensitive and romantic Emily remains instantly recognisable as being in many ways a quintessentially Gothic type of heroine, Munro's subversion of the Gothic is mainly generated through the disparity between her protagonists – Del and Rose – and the protagonists of classic Gothic fiction. Instead, the portrayal of Del and Rose is reminiscent of Austen's opening verdict on Catherine Morland: 'No one who had

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<sup>32</sup> Irene Gammel, 'Safe Pleasures for Girls: L.M. Montgomery's Erotic Landscapes', Irene Gammel (Ed.) *Making Avonlea: L.M. Montgomery and Popular Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), p123.

<sup>33</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p242.

<sup>34</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p249.

ever seen [her] in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be a heroine'.<sup>35</sup> It is these disparities that Munro exploits to engender this stage of her interaction with Gothic traditions, through her protagonists redoubtable 'realism'; her portrayal of them as normal, everyday young girls.

In *Lives of Girls and Women*, when Del's Uncle Craig dies, she is reluctant to view his body. Initially, this could suggest a suitable degree of sensibility, but this is shattered when, as her cousin Mary Agnes attempts to force her into the viewing, Del takes drastic action: 'I dropped my head and got her arm in my opened mouth [...] and I bit and bit and broke the skin and in pure freedom, thinking I had done the worst thing that I would ever do, I tasted Mary Agnes Oliphant's blood'.<sup>36</sup> The resulting family fracas generates a delightful contrast between the excuses made on Del's behalf – 'She's too highly strung. It's barbaric to subject a child like that to a funeral'<sup>37</sup> – and Del's far more prosaic reaction to the cosseting this provokes – 'I was [...] only normally as weak as anybody would be after biting a human arm'.<sup>38</sup> Rather than swooning into a stupor, Del is instead relieved to find herself wrapped up on a couch and provided with tea, sympathy, and a slice of cake she eats with undiminished appetite. In a far more distressing situation, Rose in *Who Do You Think You Are?* is equally susceptible to hunger, even when the literary conventions would suggest she should rather be wasting delicately away: 'Though it may be more romantic to picture the bereaved as gaunt, I imagine you can grieve as efficiently with chocolates as tap water'.<sup>39</sup> Thus when Rose receives a brutal beating – from her father's fists, but at her stepmother's prompting – Flo afterwards tries to bribe her with treats as a means of assuaging her own guilt: '[Rose] will turn away, refuse to look, but left alone with these eatables will be miserably tempted, roused and troubled and drawn

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<sup>35</sup> Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p7.

<sup>36</sup> Alice Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women* (London: Penguin, 1971), p55.

<sup>37</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p56.

<sup>38</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p57.

<sup>39</sup> Lionel Shriver, *We Need To Talk About Kevin* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2003), p3.

back from thoughts of suicide or flight by the smell of salmon, the anticipation of crisp chocolate [...] Soon, in helpless corruption, she will eat them all.’<sup>40</sup> There is a vast body of criticism that charts the self-flagellating tendencies of nineteenth-century heroines, who exhibit anorexic tendencies long before the diagnostic label was in use.<sup>41</sup> In refreshing contrast, Munro’s protagonists do not need to starve themselves into a sense of autonomy; they clearly reject this tradition, and inhabit their bodies with an increasing sense of acceptance.

Nor do they exhibit a conventional response to the type of threatening male sexuality that would traditionally be used to terrify the Gothic heroine and expose her vulnerability. Beverly J. Rasporich has described the ‘typical’ Gothic plot of ‘crude villains pursuing palpitating heroines’<sup>42</sup> as a ‘sexual fantasy fiction which tellingly projected the repressed feeling of a society which placed woman on a pedestal, denied her sexuality and romantically idealized her as morally superior to and more sensitive than the male.’<sup>43</sup> While this is a far from comprehensive analysis, it is still an instantly recognisable plot – and it is one that Munro challenges in both texts considered here. When Del becomes involved with Mr. Chamberlain she responds with a disturbing level of collaboration to his incredibly inappropriate advances, and the episode culminates in Del’s explicitly rejecting a moral code that views her sexual value as a vulnerable commodity – she comprehensively rejects her place on the pedestal: ‘[B]eing female made you damageable [...] whereas men were supposed to be able to go out and take on all kinds of experiences and shuck off what they didn’t want and come back proud. Without even

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<sup>40</sup> Alice Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1978), p26.

<sup>41</sup> For example, Shuttleworth observes this pathology at work in Brontë’s *Shirley*, when the sensitive Caroline Helstone slides into a cycle of self-starving depression: ‘Her physiological decline suggests a form of self-hatred focused on a desire [...] to place her self outside the sexual marketplace with its commodification of the body’. See Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, p203.

<sup>42</sup> Beverly J. Rasporich, *Dance of the Sexes: Art & Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1990), p135.

<sup>43</sup> Rasporich, *Dance of the Sexes*, p135.

thinking about it, I had decided to do the same.’<sup>44</sup> And again, Rose parallels and extends this point, in a scenario that is even more thoroughly imbued with Gothic associations. While travelling alone, as I have discussed, she is accosted and assaulted by a United Church minister. Flo has previously warned her about this possibility, in salacious tones that would not disgrace the most melodramatic penny-dreadful: ‘They kept you prisoner [...] until such time as you were thoroughly degraded and in despair, your insides torn up by drunken men and invested with vile disease, your mind destroyed by drugs’.<sup>45</sup> Rose’s response to Flo is dismissive, and while her response to the minister is exceptionally difficult to understand, it still reaffirms her rejection of victim status within her own narrative. She is sexually excited rather than repulsed, and afterwards there is a comic element to her analysis of what has happened and how it relates back to Flo’s advice: ‘Flo had mentioned people who were not ministers, dressed up as if they were. Not real ministers dressed up as if they were not.’<sup>46</sup>

Rasporich’s response to these incidents is to assert that Munro ‘has been in the process of surrendering the gothic mode, of liberating her heroine[s] from adventure as virginal gothic fantasy, making possible adventure as self-created sexually liberated fact’.<sup>47</sup> However, I would suggest that the process is rather more subtle than that. After all, Catherine Morland may not appear ‘born to be a heroine’, but the fact remains that she becomes one: ‘The network of gothic analogues that fall into our purview [...] lead us to conclude that the unassuming Catherine is indeed a gothic heroine [...] The *alarms of romance* and the *anxieties of common life* are thus, like so many apparent opposites in the novel, virtually one and the same.’<sup>48</sup> For, just as Montgomery’s parodying of the Gothic on one level of the *Emily* trilogy does not negate the many other levels at which it

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<sup>44</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p174.

<sup>45</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p73.

<sup>46</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p85.

<sup>47</sup> Rasporich, *Dance of the Sexes*, p140.

<sup>48</sup> Johnson, ‘Introduction’, pxxii. Italics in original.

continues to operate, neither does Munro's assertion of her characters' unconventionally Gothic behaviour overshadow the fact that they still exist as the protagonists of distinctly Gothic texts. Munro might shift and blur the boundaries during her re-conceptualisation, but they are still there for her protagonists to negotiate.

Laurence too subverts Gothic boundaries – especially those between texts – but through acts of subversion that hinge on pathos rather than satire. She presents characters that seem to both echo and epitomise Gothic patterns, but then complicates and ultimately 'undoes' them by revealing them to be more human and vulnerable than their Gothic counterparts. In *A Bird in the House*, this process is encapsulated in the treatment of Grandmother MacLeod. She is initially presented as an intimidating matriarch, who has maintained near-complete control of the family home, despite the presence of her son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren. Vanessa recalls that: 'The living room was another alien territory where I had to tread warily, for many valuable objects sat just-so on tables and mantelpiece, and dirt must not be tracked in upon the blue Chinese carpet [...] My mother was always nervous when I was in this room.'<sup>49</sup> The economic depression forces some restraint on Grandmother MacLeod's material ambitions (she can no longer hire servants and order linens with the *carte-blanche* she exercised in the days when 'we had resident help [...] and never less than twelve guests for dinner parties'<sup>50</sup>) but there are no such limitations imposed upon her emotional attachments to the past. Having outlived her husband and her younger son, she appears increasingly detached from the living. Even her dressing table has the quality of a shrine, as described by Vanessa:

Here resided her monogrammed dresser silver, brush and mirror, nail-buffer  
and button hook and scissors, none of which must even be fingered by me  
now, for she meant to leave them to me in her will and intended to hand

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<sup>49</sup> Margaret Laurence, *A Bird in the House* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985), p36.

<sup>50</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p38.

them over in the same flawless and unused condition in which they had always been kept.<sup>51</sup>

This dedication to the family heritage and heirlooms allies Grandmother MacLeod with a Gothic tradition of matriarchal martinets, perhaps the most notable of whom is Mrs. Danvers, the sinister housekeeper in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938). The parallels between the two are striking, although not exact. For example, while Mrs. Danvers is equally committed to maintaining her own set of 'dresser silver', she wishes to preserve the impression of use rather than the lack of it:

She put the slippers back on the floor, and laid the dressing-gown on the chair. 'You've seen her brushes, haven't you?' she said, taking me to the dressing-table; 'there they are, just as she used them, unwashed and untouched. I used to brush her hair for her every evening.'<sup>52</sup>

But while Mrs. Danvers is ultimately destructive, Grandmother MacLeod is ultimately dispossessed. After the death of her only surviving son, she leaves Manawaka for good; '[h]er men were gone, her husband and her sons, and a family whose men are gone is no family at all'.<sup>53</sup> In her final moments in the text, she is a broken, pitiable figure – all the more so for her determination not to be pitied – and her palpable loneliness undermines any previous construction of her as a domestic tyrant.

This process is even more explicitly literary in *The Diviners*, when Morag moves in with the eccentric and exotic snake-dancer, Fan Brady. Morag's first reaction to her new landlady is of shocked recognition. She sees Fan as a living version of her own fictional protagonist: 'Does fiction prophesy life? Is she looking at Lilac Stonehouse from *Spear of Innocence*? [...] looking at Fan now is like looking at some distorted and older but still

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<sup>51</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p36.

<sup>52</sup> Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca* (Stirlingshire: Virago, 2005) p190.

<sup>53</sup> Laurence, *A Bird in the House*, p94.

recognizable mirror-image of Lilac'.<sup>54</sup> Morag has previously described how Lilac is descended from the instantly familiar and frequently deployed stock figure of the kindly prostitute. In fact, one of her first reviewers describes it as '[a] dreary novel about – yawn – a goodhearted tart'.<sup>55</sup> This metafictional self-awareness initially appears as a gesture towards convention – an acknowledgement of Fan's potential to embody the clichés of her calling – and is understood as such by Clara Thomas, who reads Fan as 'another memorable variant among Margaret Laurence's gallery of Grotesques'.<sup>56</sup> Yet Fan has more depth and dimension than Thomas's reading acknowledges. In a particularly revealing exchange, she admits to Morag that she dislikes sex with men, a confession that disrupts the perception of her as just another hooker with a heart of gold.<sup>57</sup>

'I have sometimes,' Fan says carefully, 'wished I was lez. Queer. Bent as a forked twig.'

'Maybe you are. Would it bother you?'

'It would make life easier,' Fan says. 'But yeh, it would bother me.' [...] her voice has a sadness in it that Morag has never heard there before.<sup>58</sup>

Fan's brittle defences are easily seen through, and her deliberate eccentricities mask the potential for pain; she is ostentatiously blasé about her five aborted pregnancies, but as Morag notes, 'why had she got pregnant all those times? As a clueless sixteen-year-old, perhaps. But after that, what compulsion?'.<sup>59</sup> Her mannerisms and idiosyncrasies, and the glimpses of what lies beneath them, push the character beyond the stereotype and make her a vivid and memorable presence in the text. Through this repeated development of secondary characters from Gothic conventions to more psychologically interesting and

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<sup>54</sup> Margaret Laurence, *The Diviners* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1982), p309-310.

<sup>55</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p262.

<sup>56</sup> Clara Thomas, *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd, 1975), p159.

<sup>57</sup> This character type is conventionally allied to the 'happy hooker', who prostitutes herself for pleasure rather than necessity. Examples are readily found in fiction, but curiously rare in sociology.

<sup>58</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p317.

<sup>59</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p311.



sympathetic individuals, Laurence subtly alters the boundaries of her texts in relation to Gothic traditions.

This element of subversion in relation to the classic Gothic is strong in all the texts, but it is important to remember that to subvert is not unequivocally to deny or to reject. The classic Gothic may, through its very nature as eighteenth-century European melodrama, not be the most pertinent style for these twentieth-century Canadian authors, but it still exerts a powerful influence upon their treatment of the *Künstlerroman* narrative. Through acts of parody and subversion, the writers distance themselves from the classic Gothic – but they also reference it, reinterpret it, and establish it as an undeniably significant influence on their work, and that of their protagonists, the development of which will be considered further in the following section.

### **Conceptualising the Canadian Gothic – Stage Two: Regeneration**

Whilst parody and subversion are essential components of the Canadian Gothic that the writers participate in, it would not do to overlook the elements of all the texts in which the Gothic is developed beyond those components. In fact, this development can be read as a natural consequence of precisely those textual components already discussed. As Johnson observes: '[P]arody reaffirms and reconstitutes what it is parodying [...] Rather than merely asserting the reality of one and dismissing the non-reality of the other [...] we see them each anew, and we are struck first by their apparent distinctness and next by their apparent indistinguishability.'<sup>60</sup> Whilst it is indeed difficult to draw a line between the two types of Gothic interaction in the texts, I do believe that, after the more self-conscious type of engagement already discussed, the writers all move forward to the next stage, and regenerate the Gothic in the context of twentieth-century Canadian literature. What has been playful becomes serious. This can be read as a process of 'normalisation'

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<sup>60</sup> Claudia L. Johnson, 'Introduction', p xv.

– but that, of course, does not negate its power to challenge and disturb the reader: '[G]othic foregrounds and intensifies interrelated experiences such as edification, punishment, and love, experiences that are no less unsettling for being common, voluntary, or (scariest of all, perhaps) normal.'<sup>61</sup> This foregrounding of the Gothic potential that is inherent in 'normal' life plays into Edwards's understanding of the uncanny in Canadian culture, whereby through *not* being America (or indeed the UK for that matter) Canada comes to embody 'an uncanny space; it is strangely familiar and familiarly strange'.<sup>62</sup>

This sense of the uncanny is especially relevant to Montgomery's particular brand of Gothic regeneration. Each book in the *Emily* trilogy has a central psychic experience, a highly unusual device for this genre.<sup>63</sup> Traditionally, in women's Gothic writing, 'the supernatural is often suggested, but all mysterious events tend ultimately to be rationalised or explained'<sup>64</sup> – as perfectly demonstrated in texts like *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. In breaking away from this established pattern, Montgomery once more asserts her commitment to participating in a Canadian rather than a European literary tradition. Having already utilised Gothic images and conventions through the text, Montgomery has established the foundations of her next narrative move, and gone partway towards preparing the reader for what takes place. Nevertheless, although the Gothic elements provide a context for Emily's visions, they are still shocking and unexpected, and introduce an extremely unconventional dimension to the plot. In *Emily of New Moon* Emily, sick and feverish with measles, has a vision of what *really* happened to Ilse's mother, which she frantically communicates: Beatrice did not run away, but fell into the

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<sup>61</sup> Johnson, 'Introduction', pxiv.

<sup>62</sup> Edwards, *Gothic Canada*, pxv.

<sup>63</sup> In fact, *Emily Climbs* has two such incidents – Emily's rescue of the lost child, and Teddy's rescue of Emily from the locked church. The former has been comprehensively analysed by Epperly (*The Fragrance of Sweet Grass*) and Lorna Drew ('The 'Emily' Connection'), but at the expense of the latter incident, which is by far the most disturbing. Montgomery rarely uses the supernatural in her other fictions (for example the *Anne* or *Pat* series) and it is equally rare in fiction aimed at a similar audience by other writers, such as Kate Douglass Wiggins's *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903).

<sup>64</sup> Punter & Byron, *The Gothic*, p279.

well and died on her way home to Ilse. The scene is one of high (melo)drama in the best tradition of the Gothic sickroom: 'Emily fell into a troubled slumber which lasted until the gray dawn crept into the lookout. Then she opened her eyes and looked at Aunt Laura – looked through her – looked beyond her – [...] Emily's voice rose in a piercing shriek.'<sup>65</sup> The visions, although tied into the narrative of family and inheritance by Elizabeth's revelation that 'Our stepmother's mother was a Highland Scotch-woman. They said she had the second sight',<sup>66</sup> also constitute a further development of Emily's creative powers. The visions are a different and darker manifestation of her 'flash', and like the 'flash', stress Emily's connection to a 'deeper, richer dimension than most people can touch',<sup>67</sup> as well then as re-affirming her relationship with her family: 'Aunt Elizabeth's promise to search the well strengthens the bond between Emily and the traditions of New Moon'.<sup>68</sup> Initially then, it would seem that Emily's psychic abilities are a positive force – they certainly have positive consequences<sup>69</sup>: the reputation of Beatrice Burnley is completely rehabilitated, the scandal erased, and the previously neglectful Dr. Burnley transformed into a doting father. And yet Emily herself is deeply disturbed by what has happened. She prefers not to discuss her experience, and her relations seem relieved by this, and are happy to collaborate with her in this suppression – her Aunt Laura voices the belief that 'It is one of the things best not talked of – one of God's secrets'.<sup>70</sup> Whilst this reaction might seem natural enough, it is in fact extremely disturbing in light of the connection so clearly made manifest between Emily's creative abilities and her psychic powers. After all, in their respective fashions, both these aspects of Emily are open to being viewed as 'unnatural' by her society, and there is the risk that

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<sup>65</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p321.

<sup>66</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p325.

<sup>67</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p166.

<sup>68</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p167.

<sup>69</sup> At least, they have positive consequences for others, but Emily is uneasy with her powers and fears becoming the subject of malicious gossip. See Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p94.

<sup>70</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p327.

to deny one will suppress the other.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, the next demonstration of Emily's powers is especially concerning, as it directly suggests a connection between these powers and her developing sexuality – and through association, her creative ability – creating a complex web of co-dependency at the heart of her characterisation, and alerting us to the difficulties Emily will have in becoming personally and professionally fulfilled, whilst retaining her artistic and psychic abilities.

As the trilogy progresses into the second volume, Emily is increasingly aware of Teddy as a prospective love-interest. Their earlier bond has become more self-conscious, and they have begun to play games and score points off each other, as when Emily thrills to see Teddy get jealous: 'I like to feel that I *have that much power over Teddy*'.<sup>72</sup> This power takes a psychic dimension when Teddy rescues Emily from the locked church. Montgomery once more invokes the Gothic narrative; Emily is trapped and terrified, chased around the church by Mad Mr. Morrison as a storm rages outside. Emily herself admits the connection: 'The only thing she could think of at first was the horrible demon hound of the Manx Castle in *Pevearil of the Peak*'.<sup>73</sup> There is layer upon layer of symbolism at work in the setting, as well as in the figure of the madman, pursuing his lost bride. Whilst it might appear that the fearless Ilse or the practical Perry would be far more use to her, Emily calls out for Teddy: 'She did not know why she called for Teddy – she did not even realise that she *had* called him – she only remembered it afterwards, as one might recall the waking shriek in a nightmare'.<sup>74</sup> But the Gothic dimension and the psychic call to Teddy perhaps serve to distract from what is truly disturbing about this scene: the key is in the church all along. Emily could so easily free herself, as she did when locked in the bedroom in *Emily of New Moon*. Instead, she waits to be rescued,

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<sup>71</sup> For more on the problematic relationship between women and the supernatural, see Clery, *Women's Gothic*, p8-9.

<sup>72</sup> L.M. Montgomery, *Emily Climbs* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p34. Italics in original.

<sup>73</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p47. Italics in original.

<sup>74</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p49. Italics in original.

before enjoying a conventional tryst with Teddy. Epperly reads the scene as another reference to *Jane Eyre*, which proves 'Teddy is the one spiritually joined with Emily'.<sup>75</sup> But be that as it may, before they can also be joined by a kiss, Montgomery has the scene descend from Gothic nightmare to family farce: 'Could there be anything more ridiculous than to be caught here with Teddy, *by his mother*, at two o'clock at night – what was that horrid word she had lately heard for the first time? – oh, yes, *spooning* – that was it – spooning on George Horton's eighty-year-old tombstone?'<sup>76</sup> This is just about as close as Teddy and Emily will ever come to a kiss. And once more, Emily closes down to the possibility of discussing its aftermath.

She is equally unwilling and unable to understand her next 'escapade'. Montgomery furthers the plot with a second psychic episode. Emily and Ilse spend the night with a family who are desperately searching for their missing child. Both girls are distressed by the news, but while Ilse falls asleep, Emily is once more wakeful, and unable to stop thinking about the lost boy. When she finally sleeps, she draws a sketch of where the boy can be found, but has no recollection of doing this in the morning. And as much as Emily is delighted when her drawing leads to the child's rescue, she is also confused and uncomfortable at this third manifestation of her uncanny powers. She is scarcely even able to accept the gratitude of the boy's mother: 'She broke down and cried – and so did I – and we had a good howl together. I am very glad and thankful that Allan was found but I shall never like to think of the way it happened'.<sup>77</sup> Yet Emily's psychic experience is instrumental to her artistic success. Even before the drawing is discovered, the boy's great-grandmother recognises Emily as special, and shares with her a story that will become Emily's first great success: 'you haf the way and it is you I will be telling my

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<sup>75</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p179.

<sup>76</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p55. Italics in original.

<sup>77</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p210.

story'.<sup>78</sup> This link once more furthers the intrinsic connection between Emily's writing and her visions, a relationship that culminates in the final volume of the trilogy. During her ill-fated engagement to Dean, Emily suppresses and rejects her creative talent and the reader is left in no doubt that, without outside intervention, Emily will marry Dean and never write again. That intervention comes in the form of another psychic episode; it literally takes a miracle for Emily to break off the engagement. As Epperly has it 'it is only Emily's gift of second sight that saves her from the control and silence that characterize the lives of many women, even (perhaps especially?) women of great talent'.<sup>79</sup>

Alone in the Disappointed House, Emily has a visionary dream. She sees Teddy about to board his ship, which will bring him back from England. She senses he is in danger, calls to him – then wakes. Later comes the news that the ship has been sunk. And still later comes the letter from Teddy that tells her he saw her, missed the ship, and was saved. This incident forces Emily to admit that she cannot marry Dean. Epperly reads it as reinforcing of the sympathetic and supportive bond between Teddy and Emily: 'the sanctity of the psychic force [...] suggests that her love for Teddy is incontestably allied to her creative energy. Dean silences Emily's best nature. Teddy releases it'.<sup>80</sup> It certainly seems significant that, throughout the trilogy, Teddy is the only character to share in Emily's psychic episodes, the only character to connect with her in this way. And there is the possibility of a pleasing narrative symmetry in balancing this rescue against Teddy's rescue of Emily from the church in *Emily Climbs*. However, the comparison also reiterates Emily's increasing lack of agency. In *Emily Climbs*, she psychically called to Teddy to let her out of the church (surely not incidentally the location of the marriage ceremony?) when she had access to the key all along. And in

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<sup>78</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p193. 'Ha' is Montgomery's rendition of a Scottish accent.

<sup>79</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p186.

<sup>80</sup> Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, p189.

*Emily's Quest*, she can only break off her engagement, and save herself, after she has had the vision of saving Teddy. These psychic visions appear then to compromise Emily's autonomy rather than emphasise a connection with Teddy; he gives her nothing that she does not already possess, and indeed demands more of her than she has to give. His incredulous response to her saving his life is, to say the least, somewhat lacking: 'Emily, I heard a queer story of you long ago – something about Ilse's mother [...] Take care. They don't burn witches nowadays, of course – but still – '.<sup>81</sup> The warning, suspicious tone of Teddy's letter appears to admonish Emily rather than thank her, and his scepticism does not easily fit into the reading of a shared sensitivity to the paranormal realm. Montgomery's use of the Gothic in Emily's psychic experiences has a serious agenda that goes beyond the entertaining thrill of the supernatural. In introducing a genuinely paranormal element to her narrative (as opposed to providing a 'logical' explanation) she breaks away from the traditions of women's Gothic and asserts her independence from the conventional textual resolution that characterises older, European models of women's Gothic writing. Furthermore, in associating Emily's paranormal abilities so closely with her creative powers, she exposes the difficulty of reconciling these gifts with a romantic narrative. Emily is a doubly unusual young woman, separated from the mainstream of her society, and would ideally find an equally unusual and gifted partner. Teddy's unease about her powers has disturbing implications for her future career.

While Montgomery's regeneration of the Gothic hinges on the supernatural, Munro's focuses more upon the natural, and is closely associated with her Southern Ontario locations. Along with writers such as Robertson Davies, Timothy Findley and Susan Swan, Munro has been instrumental in the emergence of Southern Ontario Gothic as a distinctive generic strand. It is born from the tensions generated between the

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<sup>81</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p94.

frequently mundane realities of small town Canadian life and their more grotesque components. As Rasporich observes:

The mythology of small town Ontario as gothic is persistent and to some degree its own mystery, although partly explainable through the social reality Munro herself depicts of a long-standing, genteel and repressed Protestant class and the crumbling architecture of gothic churches and romantic Victorian culture they inhabit<sup>82</sup>

This juxtaposition is most obviously manifest within the texts in Munro's fusion of Gothic sensationalism with the more grotesque elements of everyday life; *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?* are both characterised by such a distinctive blend of carefully observed realism and Gothic fantasy. This fusion is instrumental in Munro's reworking of the Gothic; she combines the traditional imagery, character types and rhetorical tropes with more contemporary, prosaic textual elements. Her Gothic has a domesticated quality; it is brought into all aspects of ordinary life. For example, Del is fascinated by the salacious and sordid tabloid headlines collected by Uncle Benny:

FATHER FEEDS TWIN DAUGHTERS TO HOGS  
WOMAN GIVES BIRTH TO HUMAN MONKEY  
VIRGIN RAPED ON CROSS BY CRAZED MONKS  
SENDS HUSBAND'S TORSO BY MAIL<sup>83</sup>

The headlines include such Gothic stalwarts as cannibalism, incest, murder, Catholicism and its associated degeneracy, rape and maternal alienation, all presented in a titillating medium intended for mass consumption. This sense of daily melodrama could be read as a reduction of the Gothic, as though the dangerous, disturbing nature of the genre is somehow diluted by Munro's realism. But instead, it contributes towards the sense of the Gothic as a thriving and intrinsic element of the suburban landscape. Coral Ann Howells

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<sup>82</sup> Rasporich, *Dance of the Sexes*, p136.

<sup>83</sup> Alice Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p5.



suggests that Munro is not merely returning to Gothic tropes, but revitalising them with a more contemporary, more Canadian significance: 'it is gothic critically scrutinised and revised while still retaining its original charge of menace, mystery and malignity'.<sup>84</sup> The Southern Ontario Gothic provides a framework for both *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?* that establishes the Gothic – whether creepy or kitsch – as a thriving force in contemporary cultural mythologies. These are both texts that operate as 'stories about stories' and several of these stories are distinctly Gothic in tone.

In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Del initially seems almost inured to the Gothic components of her community. She blithely reports that 'There were also two idiots on the road'<sup>85</sup> – the cruelly anachronistic term highlighting the Gothic connection. But even she is shocked by the arrival of the Flats Road's very own madwoman. Madeleine is a fascinating figure of female aggression and rebellion. Benny marries her in response to a newspaper advertisement – and incidentally in doing so, provides Del with one of her first writing assignments, as he requires her help with his letter. Madeleine arrives, marries Benny, and her volatile temper quickly makes her a local legend: 'Stories of Madeleine were being passed up and down the Flats road. Something had annoyed her in the store and she had thrown a box of Kotex at Charlie Buckle'.<sup>86</sup> The gossips' response to this outburst, '*Lucky she wasn't holding a can of corn syrup!*',<sup>87</sup> is uneasily jocular; Madeleine's choice of weapon seems both completely deliberate and completely taboo, flinging the socially inadmissible paraphernalia of menstruation into the public, male gaze. She is not a likable character. She threatens and insults Del as a 'Dirty little spy-bugger',<sup>88</sup> and is physically abusive to her young daughter, Diane. But she is undeniably powerful, with something of the Grimm fairytale to her; the vicious, violent woman who

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<sup>84</sup> Coral Ann Howells, *Private and Fictional Words: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s* (London: Methuen, 1987), p76.

<sup>85</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p7.

<sup>86</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p18. Italics in original.

<sup>87</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p18.

<sup>88</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p17.

lives in the woods. And the community's final verdict, long after she has left Benny and vanished, reinforces this fairytale effect: 'We remembered her like a story, and having nothing else to give we gave her our strange, belated, heartless applause. 'Madeleine! That madwoman!'<sup>89</sup>

In *Who Do You Think You Are?* a similar role in the community mythology is allocated (even appropriated) by Becky Tyde, who is described in terms of even more graphic grotesqueness: 'She was a big-headed, loud-voiced dwarf, with a mascot's sexless swagger, a red velvet tam, a twisted neck that forced her to hold her head on one side, always looking up and sideways'.<sup>90</sup> The local gossip teems with rumours about her and her family – that her father beat his wife and children, that these beatings contributed to Becky's deformity, that her father raped her, that she became pregnant, that the child was gruesomely 'disposed of' via the family's butcher shop. What Rose appreciates, much more so than Del, is that not only is it near-impossible to separate the facts of community history from the fictions, but that it is in fact redundant to try. Del is aware of the difference between the 'real' Madeleine and the Madeleine who becomes a Flats Road legend, and she finds this unsettling: 'So lying alongside our world was Uncle Benny's world like a troubling distorted reflection, the same but never at all the same'.<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile, Rose is equally astute to the gap, but her instinct is not to let anything spoil the story: 'Present people could not be fitted into the past. Becky herself, town oddity and public pet, harmless and malicious, could never match the butcher's prisoner, the cripple daughter, a white streak at the window: mute, beaten, impregnated.'<sup>92</sup> What Munro's regeneration of the Gothic really succeeds in providing is both a convincing portrayal of how the Gothic can thrive in rural Canadian communities, and how those same communities thrive *upon* the Gothic. Their myths and legends are made up of the

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<sup>89</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p27.

<sup>90</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?* p7.

<sup>91</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p26.

<sup>92</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p10.

everyday Gothic, whilst also exaggerating the everyday until it becomes part of the Gothic tradition.

In contrast, Laurence's engagement with the Gothic could be read as much as an act of relocation as well as regeneration. Within the Manawaka cycle and in particular within the text of *The Diviners* there is an epic story that fulfils the most demanding criteria of the classic Gothic: A doomed dynasty, generations long ago noble and autocratic but now fallen on hard times, living on the edge of a community and treated with suspicion and fear. They are plagued by brutal and mysterious deaths until the once mighty clan is decimated. They are presided over by a fearsome but flawed patriarch. And finally, from this family, there emerges a beautiful and vulnerable young girl, who must struggle to make her way in the world. I am, of course, referring to the Tonnerres, and the relocation that Laurence initiates is racial in transferring the site of her most Gothic plot away from the traditionally white, upper class world and choosing instead to exploit the aptness of Gothic codes when describing the position of her Métis characters. There is a special aptness to this, when one remembers that in the earliest manifestations of the Canadian Gothic, the first nation population was cast as the source of terror and depravity, where they 'appear as gothic embodiments of inscrutable demonism'<sup>93</sup> and are described as 'devilish savages'<sup>94</sup> and 'whooping hell fiends'<sup>95</sup> in that founding text of Canadian Gothic, *Wacousta*. Laurence's presentation of the Métis redresses this, casting 'the nation as a threatening, powerful force that has mangled, mutilated and marginalized those who have stood in its path'.<sup>96</sup>

I have previously discussed Laurence's portrayal of the Tonnerre family, and their function in generating a wider vision of Canadian culture and history within the Manawaka cycle, but it seems worth repeating the litany of death and destruction that

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<sup>93</sup> Northey, *The Haunted Wilderness*, p23.

<sup>94</sup> John Richardson, *Wacousta*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993) p152.

<sup>95</sup> John Richardson, *Wacousta*, p152.

<sup>96</sup> Edwards, *Gothic Canada*, p111.

afflicts them: Lazarus, town drunk and outcast, dies aged fifty-one; Piquette is abandoned by her husband, turns to drink, and is horribly killed in a fire, along with her two small children; Valentine turns to prostitution and dies aged thirty-seven after a long, drug and alcohol related illness; The youngest brother, Paul, is mysteriously killed at twenty-five when working as a guide for American tourists – their explanation that the accomplished swimmer and canoeist drowned in the rapids is never challenged by the authorities, and his body is never recovered; And Jules too dies prematurely, committing suicide rather than wait to be finished off by throat cancer. Only one of Lazarus's children – Jacques – is still alive by the close of the text. And yet this is rarely read as an unbelievable amount of tragedy to afflict one family. Instead, it seems almost to be expected. Hildegard Kuester notes that 'the 'conventional' deaths of these Métis signify their profound depression and hopelessness'<sup>97</sup> – the key word here being 'conventional' – because of their race, these deaths are not necessarily read as shocking. That is not to say the characterisation has not been criticised, and as previously explored, it has been suggested that in her desire to represent the effects of social injustice on the Métis, Laurence risks overdoing the tragedy – that the repeated themes of death, alcoholism and social failure that surround the Tonnerres potentially comply too closely to the convention of the Métis as perpetual victims, broken and defeated, unable to find success or happiness. Yet, in light of reading Laurence's participation in the Gothic, I would suggest that there may be something more subtle at work here. Namely, that in relocating such classically Gothic tragedies to the Tonnerre family, Laurence embarks on a complex negotiation between literary innovation and social critique. On the one hand, her portrayal of the Tonnerres can be read as her particular approach to Canadian Gothic regeneration – Prairie Gothic, if you will – whilst on the other, there is an implicit challenge – she asks *why* they are willing to accept these events in the Métis context, why it should not seem excessive that

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<sup>97</sup> Hildegard Kuester, *The Crafting of Chaos: Narrative Structure in Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel and The Diviners* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1994), p121.

this particular family should suffer so much throughout the Manawaka cycle – and the answers are not easy to supply.

Once this type of reading is suggested, there are suddenly numerous incidents in the text that stop being innocuous and start supporting my argument. The premise lends new significance to the details of the Tonnerre family history. Piquette's death by fire is eerily reminiscent of Bertha Rochester – a literary predecessor who has frequently been read as racially 'other' to her society. Bertha is described as 'a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides'<sup>98</sup> who gives 'the fiercest yells and the most convulsive plunges'.<sup>99</sup> Piquette is 'flabbily fat and walks with the lurch of the habitual drunk [...] outrageously shrieking her pain aloud in public places, usually in the form of obscene insults to whoever happens to be handiest'.<sup>100</sup> Later, the casually delivered information that Paul's wife has tuberculosis also takes on a new significance, a reminder that in a wealthy, Western, twentieth-century society, it is still possible for the marginalised to suffer from an affliction more readily associated with the picturesquely consumptive sufferings of heroines in nineteenth-century literature.

However, in the best classic Gothic tradition, this reading must centre on its young, female protagonist if it is to deliver – and I would therefore posit that the protagonist of Laurence's *Prairie Gothic* is Morag and Jules's daughter, Pique. She meets all the conventional criteria: dark and dramatically beautiful, emotionally vulnerable, creatively talented. She has been incarcerated in a mental asylum (albeit after a bad acid trip rather than as part of a complex plot to steal her inheritance). On more than one occasion, she reports being threatened with sexual violence – '[m]aybe what they really would've liked was to lay me and then slit my throat'<sup>101</sup> – but the authorities reject her version of events in favour of the socially privileged men who molest her. And in an

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<sup>98</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p291.

<sup>99</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p292.

<sup>100</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p158.

<sup>101</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p107.

echo of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, one of Pique's compositions is included in the text.

Pique's song expresses her emotional connection with her heritage and her landscape:

There's a mountain holds my name, close to the sky

And those stories made that mountain seem so high

There's a mountain way up there

I used to dream I'd breathe its air

And here the voices that in me would never die.<sup>102</sup>

Radcliffe's Emily St. Aubert is of course preternaturally prolific, and the text is frequently punctuated by her compositions, which whilst coming from a very different tradition to Pique's, nevertheless share themes of personified landscape and yearning:

Wide o'er the world I waft the fresh'ning wind,

Low breathing through the woods and twilight vale,

In whispers soft, that woo the pensive mind

Of him, who loves my lonely steps to hail.<sup>103</sup>

But the real point of comparison is of context rather than content. Pique's song is the only full-length work by a female character to appear in any of the texts considered in this study, with the minor exception of Emily's earliest juvenilia. And whilst extensive editing pre-publication removed one of Morag's short stories from *The Diviners*, Pique's song was deemed important enough to remain – a decision that testifies to the significance of her creativity. For while ultimately, the true protagonist of *The Diviners* is unquestionably Morag, her daughter is nevertheless central to a Prairie Gothic subplot that is woven inextricably throughout the text. And, in aligning her particular type of Gothic regeneration with her presentation of the Métis all too believably tragic narratives, Laurence testifies to the Gothic's ability to shock and disturb, even (if not especially) when shorn of its more melodramatic elements.

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<sup>102</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p440.

<sup>103</sup> Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (London: Penguin, 2001), p510.

While the sense of regenerating the Gothic in a twentieth-century Canadian context is a dominant element of all the texts considered, the three writers each take a different approach that reflects their individual style and narrative concerns. Montgomery's deft manipulation of the paranormal provides dramatic tension, but has a serious purpose that goes beyond the thrill of the supernatural. It signals her autonomy as a twentieth-century Canadian writer, who can break away from European traditions, as well as offering a subtle and provocative means by which to outline the problems Emily faces as a creative woman in a conventional society. Munro's Southern Ontario Gothic mines the rich seam of Gothic possibility that is inherent in the communities she depicts, lending depth and texture to her creations as her stories encapsulate the mythologies that thrive in these isolated rural settings. And Laurence's epic vision of a prairie Gothic strikes back to the cultural anxieties that underline Canada's Gothic identity, offering a stark reminder of the nation's history; 'an important textual mode for trying to come to terms with a postcolonial past and its multicultural and diasporic complexity'.<sup>104</sup> But while the writers' precise tactics and agendas vary, they share a commitment to engaging with Gothic fiction in ways that reassert its transgressive potential and its ability to challenge, to disconcert and to confront the reader with both strange fictions and disturbing truths.

### **Gothic Masculinities**

Having established throughout that this is a specific study of *women* writers and *female* protagonists, it may now seem slightly perverse to turn the spotlight so firmly onto the male characters within the texts; and yet it is precisely in the male characters that the picture in the centre of the complex framework of Gothic themes and influences comes so clearly into its own. There are obviously female characters who epitomise Gothic

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<sup>104</sup> Edwards, *Gothic Canada*, pxxii.

prototypes – one of the most compelling being Teddy’s twisted mother, Aileen Kent, whom Montgomery positively saturates in Gothic tropes and traditions. Facially scarred, isolated from the community, and so jealous of her husband and son’s affections that she is compulsively prone to poisoning the family pets (although mercifully drawing the line at pigeons in the park), she is a magnificently over-the-top study in sexual and social alienation. And yet while Mrs Kent’s maliciousness influences the plot of the trilogy through her conspiracy to keep Teddy and Emily apart, when considering the portrayal and significance of Gothic character types in all the texts, she fails to exert the same impact upon my reading as the male characters. Rather, I would posit that it is in their portrayal of male characters that Montgomery, Munro and Laurence choose to most explicitly deploy the Gothic influences, and that this creates a revealing insight into the presentation of male-female relationships throughout the texts. After all, the protagonists are all portrayed as heterosexual<sup>105</sup> and, to different degrees of importance within the narratives, they all seek emotional and physical fulfilment in relationships with men. Whether they actually find this fulfilment is a question that dominates the presentation of their adult lives, and the use of the Gothic in presenting masculinity is therefore critically important in my reading of the female protagonists.

In the typically tongue-in-cheek short story ‘Forewarned’ (first published in 1916), Saki helpfully provides the following guide to male characters in Gothic literature:

There were three dominant types of manhood to be taken into consideration  
[...] there was Hugo, who was strong, good and beautiful, a rare type and  
not very often met with; there was Sir Jasper, who was utterly vile and  
absolutely unscrupulous; and there was Nevil, who was not really bad at

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<sup>105</sup> Although Emily’s relationship with Ilse is sensual and deeply passionate, this is more indicative of the strength of their emotional connection, and of the shortcomings of her relationship with Teddy, than it is of actual homosexual desire.



heart, but had a weak mouth and usually required the life-work of two good women to keep him from ultimate disaster.<sup>106</sup>

This ironic litany is by no means a comprehensive blueprint for reading the presentation of Gothic masculinity in twentieth-century Canadian women's writing, but it is an intriguing point of reference. The texts considered in this study are not obviously populated with weak-mouthed 'Nevils' – but there are likeable men who are physically and/or mentally isolated from mainstream masculinity. These characters can be read almost as 'idiot savants', being benign and frequently valued for their specific talents, even while these are not enough to compensate for their lack of conventional manly attributes. There may not be an abundance of villainous 'Sir Jaspers', twirling their mustachios and deflowering six peasant girls each before breakfast – but there are dark and damaged men who project their malignity into damaging others, and pose a far more credible threat to the protagonists' emotional and creative wellbeing. And as always the 'Hugos' are sadly lacking – but there are male love interests, and their various shortcomings are as interesting to criticise as they are frustrating to read about. In considering how these different character types are utilised by each author in the study, this section will demonstrate the effect this has upon the narrative, whilst also exploring just how central the construction and presentation of masculinities is to a reading of the Gothic in the Canadian *Künstlerroman*.

The first group of male characters to be discussed are Cousin Jimmy in the *Emily* trilogy, Uncle Benny and Bobby Sherriff in *Lives of Girls and Women* and Christie Logan in *The Diviners*.<sup>107</sup> These men, to different degrees, are all inherently well-meaning and benign towards the creative protagonist, but are thwarted by their mental and/or physical

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<sup>106</sup> Hector Hugh Munro, *The Complete Stories of Saki* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), p314-315.

<sup>107</sup> It is not always viable to discuss all of the texts, and so my argument draws only from the relevant sources, and *A Bird in the House* is omitted altogether as offering little of interest to this particular case study of Gothic masculinities.

limitations. These limitations exclude them from more conventional types of masculinity; indeed it can be argued that it is precisely this exclusion that draws them into sympathetic relationships with the equally disempowered position of the young girl. They are presented as disenfranchised from mainstream masculinity, financially and sexually unsuccessful, and socially marginalised through their difference.<sup>108</sup>

Emily's Cousin Jimmy is a gentle and sympathetic figure, with an ingenuously innocent appearance – 'a little, rosy, elfish face [...] as kind and frank as a child's'<sup>109</sup> – and they immediately form a close relationship. He is, as Montgomery's earlier protagonist would phrase it, a 'kindred spirit' who treats Emily with respect and affection. Although he belongs to the same generation as Elizabeth and Laura, Montgomery locates his relationship to Emily as 'cousin' rather than 'uncle', suggesting that despite the discrepancy in age, they relate to each other as peers rather than as adult and child. The community view Jimmy with a patronising suspicion – to them, he is a harmless idiot, mortally afflicted from a childhood accident, when Elizabeth lost her temper and pushed him down a well. This could be read as a damning verdict on uncontrolled female anger – Jimmy is displaced from his 'rightful' place as head of the household, and Elizabeth usurps him as the 'boss' of New Moon. However, Jimmy does not seem especially resentful at the loss of this prestige: 'Folks say I've never been quite right since – but they only say that because I'm a poet'.<sup>110</sup> For him, and later for Emily, the real damage is the effect this accident has upon his creative talent – he is a poet who cannot write anything down. Jimmy's creative impotence might just as well be physical too – he is effectively neutered, with no apparent love interests<sup>111</sup> – although this seems par for the course

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<sup>108</sup> None of these men are presented as biological fathers – although Benny briefly has a step-daughter, and Christie had a child that died in infancy – suggesting a lack of virility that reinforces their alienation from traditional measures of masculinity.

<sup>109</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p27.

<sup>110</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p67.

<sup>111</sup> Although in the 1998 CBC TV adaptation, this was 'remedied' with a plot that had Jimmy fall in love with a beautiful woman called Eve, only for her to be arrested on their wedding day and convicted of murdering her father.

among the resolutely single elder residents of New Moon. Yet despite this, he is still a surprisingly forceful figure within the trilogy. He does not often contradict Elizabeth, but when he does, she generally listens to him – as when he defends Emily to Miss Brownell, or hires Perry in spite of his reputation for mischief. Like Emily, he seems to tread close to the dividing line between the realms of the natural and the supernatural, and occasionally utters strange and mystical pronouncements: ‘There is a spell woven round this garden. The blight shall spare it and the green worm pass it by. Drought dares not invade it and the rain comes here gently’.<sup>112</sup> The effect is startling, and lends this marginalised figure a certain otherworldly dignity.

Jimmy’s most important function within the text is the support he provides for Emily’s writing. Throughout her childhood, he supplies her with notebooks. At one point, Emily even jokes that he must have some magic ability, because he always buys her a new notebook just as she is running out of space in the old one – it seems worth commenting on, as the likelihood that Jimmy simply checks how much she has written does not seem to bother Emily at all – the usually reserved and intensely private girl has no qualms on this count, suggesting that she either trusts him implicitly to respect the privacy of her work, or that she does not consider her work private from him. This suggestion of collaboration (however unequally balanced) is furthered when Jimmy proves instrumental in helping Emily achieve publication, when he sends off *The Moral of the Rose* after Emily has given up on approaching publishers. This plot device has been criticised for compromising Emily’s agency, but this type of reading overlooks Jimmy’s lack of conventional power and his complete admiration for Emily’s work.<sup>113</sup> Ultimately, Jimmy’s role within the trilogy is almost that of a sorcerer’s familiar, or a (mad) scientist’s assistant; sufficiently sensitive to Emily’s creativity to assist in minor ways with her

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<sup>112</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*, p69.

<sup>113</sup> For more on this, see p210-211.

practice, but lacking the strength in abilities and resources to perform such enchantments and experiments himself.

In *Lives of Girls and Women*, the figure of Uncle Benny can be read as being a similar type, but he is obviously far less important within the narrative. Despite the implications of his (strictly nominal) title he is another character who occupies some strange hinterland between child and adult life. Del does not emulate Emily's immediate, loving sympathy with this particular specimen of damaged masculinity, and her attitude towards Benny is inherently ambivalent. She is sceptical of his stories, but enjoys hearing them. She is perturbed by his lack of knowledge but takes great satisfaction in the opportunity this provides for her to demonstrate her own skills, as when she helps him write a letter to his future wife, Madeleine.<sup>114</sup> Del's main emotional response to Benny appears to be simply childish superiority. It is possible to delve deeper into the Gothic potential of Uncle Benny, and both Howells and Rasporich have developed this reading further. Their mutual starting point is the physical appearance of Benny, with his 'heavy black moustache, fierce eyes, [...] delicate predatory face'.<sup>115</sup> Howells uses this as the basis to claim that 'Del sees him as a sweetly sadistic gothic villain',<sup>116</sup> although I find this connection somewhat unconvincing. His wife certainly seems to enjoy abusing her daughter, but Benny is, at worst, merely complicit in this. More plausible are both critics' observations that Benny's house 'with its wealth of wrecked furniture and its odours of disintegration'<sup>117</sup> provides Del with a gateway into her personal realm of gothic fantasy – a place where she can pore over the salacious newspapers and imagine 'the mythic puritan-inspired world of gothic horror, its erotic possibility and male-directed evil'<sup>118</sup> – but this is an issue of location rather than character. I would argue that Benny, although

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<sup>114</sup> Although Benny is not as completely de-sexualised as Cousin Jimmy, the marriage is an unmitigated disaster, and it seems probable that it is never actually consummated.

<sup>115</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p2.

<sup>116</sup> Howells, *Private and Fictional Words*, p77.

<sup>117</sup> Howells, *Private and Fictional Words*, p77.

<sup>118</sup> Rasporich, *Dance of the Sexes*, p139.

an intriguing example of a disenfranchised masculinity, provides more in terms of social detail than narrative drive, and as Del grows up, he fades into the background of her story.

And yet he is not the only marginalised male character in *Lives of Girls and Women*. At the close of the text, Munro offers a cameo portrait of Bobby Sherriff, the 'simple' son of a scandalous family. Del's meeting with Bobby, whom she has previously utilised as inspiration for her own gothic novel, is a pivotal encounter in her development as a writer. Confronted with his reality, rather than the fiction she has constructed around him, Del is suddenly fascinated, and turns her focus away from her imaginary realm and onto the man sitting beside her: 'Odd to think that he shaved, that he had hair on his face like other men, and a penis in his pants'.<sup>119</sup> Del's admittance of Bobby's (still unconventional) masculinity seems especially important in light of her previous conception of him as 'neutered' by madness – perhaps just as Benny was 'neutered' by eccentricity. In *Lives of Girls and Women*, this character type is therefore most important as charting Del's creative progress from a child, devouring tabloid horrors, into a young woman who is ready to appreciate the complexity of real life. And while neither Benny nor Bobby directly aids Del in the way that Jimmy assists Emily, they are nevertheless significant in forming her earliest fictions.<sup>120</sup>

The last character of this type to consider is by far the most vividly realised – Christie Logan in Laurence's *The Diviners*. Physically, he verges on the grotesque – a shrivelled individual who would not be out of place in the pages of Charles Dickens or Wilkie Collins.<sup>121</sup> In keeping with the tradition his appearance evokes, his social standing is as stunted as his stature; he is the town 'scavenger', collecting the rubbish and detritus

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<sup>119</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p248.

<sup>120</sup> The similarity of their names could well be deliberate– Munro's naming of Rose in *Who Do You Think You Are?* demonstrates her attention to symbolic detail in this matter.

<sup>121</sup> Indeed, the image this scrawny man presents beside the vast, plodding bulk of his wife recalls the similarly mismatched pairing of Captain and Mrs Wragge in Collins's *No Name* (1862).

of Manawaka town and delivering it out to the dump. Christie is a joke to the townspeople, and a frequent source of mortification to Morag. In some ways, Christie is more vulnerable than any of the characters considered so far: Cousin Jimmy still has the status of the Murray family and New Moon, Uncle Benny has the sense to live on the Flats Road, where his eccentricities are almost mandatory, and Bobby Sherriff is sheltered by money and education. In the adult community, Christie is isolated and caricatured, an easy target for snobbish mockery. Yet he exerts an inversely proportionate influence on the life of the text's protagonist: Bobby and Benny are secondary players in Del's drama, and while Emily may love Jimmy, he never replaces her father, which is precisely what does happen with Morag and Christie. When Morag acknowledges Christie to have 'been my father to me'<sup>122</sup> she not only admits her love for him – she also makes explicit the connection between them, in particular the influence his early storytelling has had on her eventual career path. Altogether, Morag's increasing acceptance of her identification with Christie is presented as a positive phase in her personal development. When she evokes Christie's distinctive vocabulary in a fight with Brooke – 'by judas priest and all the sodden saints in fucking Beulah Land'<sup>123</sup> – it is a wonderful moment of self-assertion in the face of a stifling relationship. And her final acceptance of his parenting testifies to her maturity and self-confidence – she is no longer ashamed to be his daughter. But it is possible that the wider implications of this connection reveal an altogether less palatable truth behind the deployment of Christie-type characters in the texts.

After all, it is one thing to highlight the correlation between the conventional social standing of these damaged, disenfranchised men and the precocious girls they befriend. It is another to question the continuation of this mutual sympathy into the adult life of the increasingly successful young women, especially in the cases of Emily and Morag. What exactly (other than the obvious bonds of family affection) is the point of

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<sup>122</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p396.

<sup>123</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p256.

these relationships? What is the reasoning behind their inclusion in the *Künstlerroman*? Unsettling as it is to acknowledge, I believe that these relationships ultimately function to demonstrate the isolation and estrangement from mainstream society that is inherent within the protagonist's creative careers: the lack of intellect and success in a man is as distasteful to others as the surplus of intellect and success in a woman. As a direct comparison, it is rather on the crass side, but the Gothic elements to the male characterisation can be seen to act as a smokescreen, softening and restraining the delivery of the message. Unusually then, in the case of the disenfranchised male characters in the texts, the Gothic presence lends subtlety to their role within the *Künstlerroman* narrative. 'Subtle' is, after all, not the first word readily associated with male characters in Gothic texts, especially as the time comes now to focus on the villains. 'Prowling', 'malevolent', 'depraved' perhaps, but rarely 'subtle'. And yet when considering the villains in these texts, they too serve a more complicated purpose than may initially be apparent.

In the classic Gothic narrative, 'the transgressive male becomes the primary threat to the female protagonist',<sup>124</sup> and the threat posed is invariably that of sexual violence. Lovelace intends to rape Clarissa. Manfred intends to rape Isabella. Montoni would force Emily into marriage with Count Morano. Laura Fairlie is, to all intents and purposes, forced into marriage with Sir Percival Glyde. In texts where actual frank discussion of sexuality is taboo, the threat of rape (within or without the married state) is nevertheless inherently present to an obscene degree, as noted by Rasporich: 'The original gothic mode of fiction, with its primary emotions of fear and terror, its crude villains pursuing palpitating heroines, was primarily a sexual fantasy fiction which tellingly projected the repressed feeling of a society which placed woman on a pedestal, denied

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<sup>124</sup> Punter & Byron, *The Gothic*, p279.

her sexuality and romantically idealized her.<sup>125</sup> Therefore, it is critical when considering Gothic villains in the twentieth-century Canadian *Künstlerroman* to pay close attention to how the writers reinterpret this threat. Despite the frequently menacing and potentially violent portrayal of certain characters and situations,<sup>126</sup> and the undeniably disturbing ways in which desire can become manifest, the texts avoid explicitly engaging with sexual violence.

Dean is undoubtedly a sinister force within Montgomery's trilogy, and his quasi-paedophilic desire towards Emily is made repulsively clear. But, even during their engagement, this desire does not manifest physically. Indeed, Montgomery goes as far as to suggest that this 'restraint' on his part contributes to Emily's eventual escape: 'He had never kissed her yet [...] He might have dared it there and then [...] he might even have won her wholly then. But he hesitated – and the magic moment passed'.<sup>127</sup> In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Mr. Chamberlain is explicitly linked to the tradition of Gothic villainy through his association with Italy – cultural Gothic shorthand for decadence and depravity – but Del's control of this situation has already been discussed, and her response to his lecherous travelogues is to incorporate them into her private fantasy realm: 'I rubbed my hipbones [...] If I had been born in Italy my flesh would already be used, bruised, knowing'.<sup>128</sup> And in *The Diviners* Morag is shaken when a one-night stand becomes aggressive, but this is ultimately a minor incident in the narrative and the character is never mentioned again. So while the potential for sexual violence is neither negated nor dismissed, nor is it the main threat posed by 'villainous' male characters, the most interesting, complex and threatening of which are Dean, Patrick in *Who Do You Think You Are?* and Brooke in *The Diviners*. Dean may be the only one of this delightful

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<sup>125</sup> Rasporich, *Dance of the Sexes*, p135.

<sup>126</sup> Munro's presentations of Mr. Chamberlain in *Lives of Girls and Women* and the Minister in *Who Do You Think You Are?* are especially steeped in this disturbing potential.

<sup>127</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p74.

<sup>128</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p151.



trinity to actually possess a hunchback, but they all still share some traits with their more melodramatic predecessors that clearly mark them out as having Gothic potential. Patrick lacks the suave poise of a successful villain – he almost recalls the petulant and ineffectual Linton Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* – but he still commands money and power. He is also the most conventionally – by which I mean physically – violent, and Rose dispassionately records him attacking her: ‘Once in the kitchen of this house Patrick had tried to choke her’.<sup>129</sup> Meanwhile, Brooke, with his aristocratic face and colonial roots, needs only the moustache and riding boots to be as quintessentially Gothic in type as Dean.

As outlined, none of these characters poses an explicitly physical sexual threat to the protagonists, but their interest is still sexually motivated, and shares at least one defining factor with the classic Gothic ‘Sir Jasper’: they each fetishise female inexperience. Dean is first drawn to Emily’s extreme youth and innocence, while Patrick and Brooke are both reassured to discover their future wives (also both younger than them, albeit antiquated by Dean’s standards) are virgins. Patrick at least has the excuse of sharing his first sexual experience with Rose, who wryly recalls that ‘his relief at her virginity matched hers at his competence’<sup>130</sup> while the hypocritical Brooke helpfully explains that ‘I would have been – well, disappointed’<sup>131</sup> if Morag had had any previous lovers. But still, sex is not the chosen weapon of destruction: Dean never touches Emily, and despite a plenitude of other problems in their relationships, both Rose and Morag recall taking pleasure from the physical side of their marriages. Instead, in these narratives, the threat posed by these men is intellectual rather than physical – what they are trying to destroy are the protagonists’ careers rather than their reputations.

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<sup>129</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?* p181.

<sup>130</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are*, p111.

<sup>131</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p200.

Dean consummately manipulates Emily into destroying her first novel, and during their engagement, she abandons her writing altogether. Patrick drags Rose into a stifling suburban existence, and undermines her creativity with his bourgeois hostility towards the arts, especially theatre: 'Modern Art was a Hoax. Avant-garde plays were filthy. Patrick had a special, mincing, spitting way of saying avant-garde, making the words seem disgustingly pretentious'.<sup>132</sup> Brooke's idea of post-coital pillow talk is to rewrite Morag's future around himself, skilfully dismissing her suggestion that she complete university: 'If you want to go on, of course, you've a perfect right to do so. On the other hand, you might feel a bit awkward about attending classes, with your husband teaching'.<sup>133</sup> All three men feel entitled to subordinate the protagonists' intellectual and creative capabilities to their own desires, and attempt to transform them into, as Brooke phrases it, 'women who [seem] mainly to care about connecting warmly with a man'.<sup>134</sup> Emily, Rose and Morag all have to break free from these men before they can successfully pursue their chosen careers: Emily is able to write another novel, Rose begins to act and teach, and Morag – who actually writes her first novel while still married to Brooke – is able to use this as a fulcrum in leaving him. Through evoking the spectre of Gothic villainy, and tapping into a type of narrative where there is an inherent female fear of male designs, Montgomery, Munro and Laurence thus succeed in encoding a bleak observation on male/female relationships within the Gothic symbolism of their texts. The female fear that inhabits the Gothic is both legitimised and redirected: while a female protagonist's virtue may be safer in twentieth-century Canada than eighteenth-century Italy, her creative autonomy and psychological independence must still be guarded against the machinations of a new breed of male villain.

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<sup>132</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p140.

<sup>133</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p202.

<sup>134</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p258.

Finally, the last group of male characters to consider in terms of their Gothic heritage are the protagonists' love interests. As all the texts in this study are nominally heterosexual, the narrative is frequently propelled forward by the protagonists' search for a fulfilling romantic relationship. Indeed, this search is the backbone of Gothic classics as seminal as *Jane Eyre*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and *The Woman in White*: all of which culminate in celebrating the joyful and successful union of previously thwarted soul mates. And yet there is a distinct lack of precisely this type of partnership within the texts – and an alarming degree of overlap between this category and the previous group discussed. Still, once Dean, Patrick and Brooke have already been dealt with, there still remains an extensive line-up of male characters who should supply the romantic interest to the narratives. But the operative word is, unfortunately, 'should'.

For example, Teddy *should* be the perfect romantic partner for Emily. He is handsome, he is creative, and he twice demonstrates a degree of psychic affinity with her that is reminiscent of Rochester's bond to Jane Eyre. But despite these qualities, he remains a dull and irritating character: spoiled, selfish and prone to unattractive fits of petulance. Even his name seems to pick up on the immaturity of his character – he never grows into being 'Frederick Kent' and continues to use the childish diminutive into his adult life<sup>135</sup> – in contrast, Emily gains pride and confidence from her full name, which connects her to her family heritage and sense of self. His eventual suitability as her husband has already been discussed, but what is worth noting here that his vacuous flatness as a character further reinforces Montgomery's connection to classic Gothic tradition. After all, the 'love interest' is rarely the most intriguing man in a Gothic text. Ann Radcliffe's own Emily is wedded to the dogmatically noble Valancourt, a cut-and-paste character who 'anachronistically [has] the fashionable sensibility, manners and

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<sup>135</sup> The term 'Teddy Bear' was coined in 1902, and so the name carries established connotations that reinforce the sense of his childish immaturity.

tastes of eighteenth-century England'<sup>136</sup> while Wilkie Collins' Walter Hartright is damned with faint praise as 'a standard hero [...] comparatively passive'.<sup>137</sup> Once Teddy is understood as a pattern hero, cut from this particularly bland bolt of Gothic cloth, his role within the trilogy actually becomes more interesting. Montgomery's portrayal of Teddy pays ironic lip-service to the narrative tradition that demands the concluding nuptials. His flat characterisation calls attention to the arbitrary nature of Emily's marriage, and reinforces my interpretation that although the trilogy ends in marriage, this is a matter of concession rather than celebration.

Munro is equally engaged in challenging the conventional love narrative, and does so via the strategic invocation of Gothic romance. In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Del's relationship with Garnet is rich with Gothic imagery and associations. With his saturnine good looks and criminal record, Garnet is the perfect screen for Del to project her sexual fantasies upon: 'I talked to myself about myself, saying *she*. *She is in love. She has just come in from being with her lover. She has given herself to her lover. Seed runs down her legs*'.<sup>138</sup> For a brief time, their relationship provides Del with mental as well as physical satisfaction: they are not intellectually compatible, but Del experiences their connection as a manifestation of previously imagined urges and sensations. The relationship breaks down when she realises that Garnet has felt in earnest the conventional romance that she has merely fantasised: 'it seemed to me impossible that he should not understand that all the powers I granted him were in play, that he himself was – in play, that I meant to keep him sewed up in his golden lover's skin forever'.<sup>139</sup> Garnet's failure to remain 'sewed up' bursts Del's romantic construction of them at the seams, and their relationship instantly unravels. Howells reads this as a definitive break from the Gothic: Del has 'disproved that old

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<sup>136</sup> Jacqueline Howard, 'Introduction', Ann Radcliffe, *Mysteries of Udolpho* (London: Penguin, 2001), pxi.

<sup>137</sup> Julian Symons, 'Introduction', Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p15.

<sup>138</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p228. Italics in original.

<sup>139</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p234.

romantic plot of a woman's transformation through sex'.<sup>140</sup> However, I believe that plot is not so definitively disproved, and the relationship to Gothic romance not so easily relinquished as Howells' reading suggests. The desire to idealise the lover, to find romance in real life, is a theme Munro returns to in *Who Do You Think You Are?*, when Rose is forced to acknowledge that in her brief affair with Simon, she has completely overlooked his autonomous reality in her desire to find a romantic hero for a much later stage of her adult life than Del's teenage drama: 'She had turned Simon into the peg on which her hopes were hung and she could never manage now to turn him back into himself'.<sup>141</sup> In Munro's fiction, the allure of the romantic hero is acknowledged, and the difficulty of sustaining this fantasy is presented as a long-term struggle rather than a one-off realisation: 'not an ending but something that will be repeated'.<sup>142</sup> If Montgomery subverts the 'happy ending' by nominally creating it, Munro challenges it by taking the narrative past that point, and exposing it as a hollow concept.

Laurence's treatment of the male love interest is different. Admittedly, Michael in *A Bird in the House* is even more dull and one-dimensional than Teddy, skulking off stage once his marriage is exposed, a meek and thwarted parody of Mr. Rochester, taking defeat like a mouse. But in *The Diviners*, the portrayal of Jules Tonnerre is in a league of its own. Just as *The Diviners* offers the most complex and multifaceted construction of the *Künstlerroman* narrative, so too does Laurence present the most complex and intriguing characterisation of the protagonist's romantic and sexual partner – a complexity that is rooted in the Gothic potential of the Métis narrative previously discussed. Just as the tragic past and troubled present of the Tonnerre clan provides Pique with the aura of a Gothic heroine, so too does it suggest a foundation to construct a reading that views Jules as less of a love-interest, and more of a protagonist in his own right. *The Diviners* is a

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<sup>140</sup> Howells, *Private and Fictional Words*, p84.

<sup>141</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?* p224.

<sup>142</sup> Magdalene Redekop, *Mothers and Other Clowns: The stories of Alice Munro* (London: Routledge, 1992), p84.

novel surrounded by shadow-texts, by untold stories that exist between the lines of Morag's narrative, and Jules's story is one of these. And if Pique is the protagonist of a female Gothic shadow-text, Jules's narrative encapsulates its counterpoint: 'the plot of the male Gothic [which] focuses on questions of identity, and on the male protagonist's transgressions of social taboos'.<sup>143</sup> He is also the protagonist of an unwritten *Künstlerroman* that occasionally comes into contact with Morag's narrative, and provides a distorted reflection of her own creative progress.<sup>144</sup> Like Morag, Jules struggles to leave Manawaka behind, and can never really disassociate himself from his past. He attempts to express himself with his song writing, but is censured for rebelling against conventionally sentimental country-music mythology and singing about the reality of his existence: 'At first, they just didn't listen. Then they laughed, some. Then they started yellin' that they wanted him to sing stuff like 'Roll out the barrel'. So he gets mad and leaves and goes drinkin'.<sup>145</sup> Laurence does not romanticise Jules' self destructive drinking or his depressive tendencies, but nor does she criticise them – his character is drawn with the same 'take it or leave it' bluntness that typifies his relationship with Morag. Even his suicide is pragmatic and free from melodrama: 'Just that. He didn't wait'.<sup>146</sup> Instead of functioning as a mentor, or as a cautionary tale, or even as a conventionally romantic hero, Jules's role in *The Diviners* is to introduce a new level of intertextuality that shares the same Gothic point of departure, and reinforces the idea of the *Künstlerroman* as a narrative of struggle.<sup>147</sup>

Ultimately, this section focused on the treatment of Gothic masculinities not merely for character studies, but for the impact this has upon the dominant narrative of

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<sup>143</sup> Punter & Byron, *The Gothic*, p278.

<sup>144</sup> The device of pairing the female protagonist with a creative male partner is not unique to Laurence – Teddy in the *Emily* trilogy is an artist – but Teddy's career is remote and unexplored, while Jules's efforts are recorded in sporadic but intense detail, and the lyrics to 'his' songs form the majority of the book's 'Album' appendix.

<sup>145</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p280.

<sup>146</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p447.

<sup>147</sup> For more on the plight of the male artist-protagonist in Canadian fiction, see Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972) p179-194.

the Canadian female artist – an impact I believe is essential to understanding the portrayal of these men in relation to the female protagonists, and the implications that male / female relationships have for developing an understanding of the protagonists. These texts contain sketches of marginalised masculinities that highlight the female artist's marginalisation from mainstream society. They contain malevolent masculinities that call attention to the threat posed to female creativity by male insecurity and need. And they contain complicated and problematic romantic relationships that both evoke and undermine the expectations created by their interplay with Gothic patterns and tropes. The treatment of masculinity thus demonstrates this regenerated brand of the Gothic at its best, emphasising how the Gothic can be re-worked to deliver new insight into the characterisation, and a better understanding of the protagonists' complicated relationships. But the *Künstlerroman* is driven by creative rather than romantic forces, and so the final value of the regenerated Canadian Gothic must be found in considering its impact upon the protagonists' as *writers*.

### **The Impact of the Gothic upon the *Künstlerroman* Narrative**

The function of the Canadian Gothic within the texts can be seen as working on several levels: it is an important device in framing and reinforcing the narrative of literary development, heightening the reader's response to the protagonists, establishing the complex web of intertextuality – especially in terms of connecting to a very female literary tradition – and it provides a coded means to discuss male / female relationships, with particular reference to the male threat to creative endeavour. But the focus of this analysis remains the Canadian female *Künstlerroman*, and it is in this context that the interplay with the Canadian Gothic is at its most revealing and complicated. Despite the Gothic influences that are so strikingly at work within the texts, a distance emerges between this background and the protagonists' actual careers. Within each *Künstlerroman*

narrative, there is a realm of 'inner-text' – the work of the protagonist – and in this realm, the Gothic is, although by no means unequivocally rejected, problematised and distanced from its otherwise dominant role. This process begins with the treatment of the protagonists' careers as *work*. The classical Gothic approach to creativity hinges on the myth of inspiration, the possessing spirit of poetry that takes hold of the artist and overwhelms them, so that their creative output has more in common with the 'automatic writing' of a nineteenth-century spiritualist than a twentieth-century career woman. It is, as Howells phrases it, a view of writing as 'psychic insurrection'<sup>148</sup> rather than hard graft. Radcliffe's own prolific Emily barely breaks sweat as she composes page after page of poetry: 'Struck with the circumstances of imagery around her [...] her ideas arranged themselves in the following lines'.<sup>149</sup> There is no suggestion of drafting and re-drafting, of struggling to find the right words. Instead, Emily is a vehicle that responds to beauty, and her writing is as instantaneous as her thoughts. This type of creativity is challenged by all three writers – but the first step towards that challenge is to evoke the myth, and acknowledge its seductive appeal.

Emily writes her first novel, *A Seller of Dreams*, in a six-week haze of urgent inspiration: 'Everything else was forgotten [...] Nothing mattered but her story [...] Wit, tears and laughter trickled from her pen'.<sup>150</sup> Emily appears to be a vessel for this story rather than its director. It is an attractive view of the writing process – the mystical montage of achievement rather than the mundane and frequently frustrating reality of working towards self-expression. But it proves to be fragile and unsustainable. Emily is too quick to question her success, too dependent on external validation, and ultimately, she destroys her creation. In contrast, her second novel is more slowly developed, more obviously worked on: 'She was very much absorbed in it by this time. The composition

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<sup>148</sup> Howells, *Private and Fictional Words*, p48.

<sup>149</sup> Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, p72.

<sup>150</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p47.



of it was never the ecstatic rite the creation of *A Seller of Dreams* had been, but it was very fascinating'.<sup>151</sup> Del is similarly possessed by the plot for her own Gothic novel: 'I carried it – the idea of it – everywhere with me, as if it were one of those magic boxes a favoured character gets hold of in a fairy story'<sup>152</sup> but this finally loses its appeal in favour of an approach to fiction that is more realistic both in terms of subject and in method: 'I would want to write things down. I would try to make lists'.<sup>153</sup> Morag's first novel, *A Spear of Innocence*, written during a period of intense unhappiness and stress, manifests itself as an unbreakable compulsion: 'Morag begins writing the novel almost unexpectedly, although Lilac has been in her mind for some time. She has no idea where the character has come from'.<sup>154</sup> But while writing *Spear of Innocence* is the catalyst that ends Morag's marriage and liberates her from Brooke, this is not a working method that can sustain her increasingly successful career. Apart from anything else, immersive, overwhelming productivity in the Gothic vein is not easily reconciled with the realities of life as a single working mother: 'This had been the pattern of life for how long? Morag at this table, working, and people arriving and saying, in effect, *Please don't let me interrupt you*. But they *did* interrupt her, damn it'.<sup>155</sup> In reinforcing the idea of writing as labour, there is also the acknowledgement that this is a gendered issue. Few male *Künstlerroman* protagonists have to balance domestic and creative duties: David Copperfield's wife sits and sharpens his pens while Morag's husband would like to know when dinner will be ready.

While this progression beyond the traditional act of Gothic-style writing is a definite presence within the texts, it is not an outright rejection. Acknowledging that writing is work does not equate with proposing that anyone who works hard enough can be a writer. Especially in the cases of Emily and Morag, the concept of talent remains

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<sup>151</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p147. Italics in original.

<sup>152</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p241.

<sup>153</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p249.

<sup>154</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p225.

<sup>155</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p349. Italics in original.

central to the portrayal of their careers. Emily is singled out as a uniquely gifted writer, and this is obviously reinforced by her connection to a supernatural realm: 'She belonged by right divine to the Ancient and Noble Order of Story-tellers'.<sup>156</sup> And while Morag is defensive about her workload, this does not negate that she is also driven by raw talent and the complex compulsion to express herself through her fiction: 'She does not know where it came from. It comes into your head, and when you write it down, it surprises you, because you never knew what was going to happen until you put it down'.<sup>157</sup> The novels – especially the three that deal directly with writing – thus take a self-consciously sceptical approach to the nature of the creative process that both engages with and partially undermines the Gothic ideal. The purpose of this can be best understood by turning to *The Diviners*, and the titular analogy of water-divining that Laurence uses to parallel Morag's career. Morag's neighbour Royland is, on the one hand, a mystical figure, 'The Old Man of the River',<sup>158</sup> who possesses a rare and special gift, beyond the grasp of most other people. But he is also a pragmatist who develops this gift into a practical living, works hard at his career, and takes a revealing view of his talent: 'it's not something that everybody can do, but [...] quite a few people can learn to do it. You don't have to have the mark of God between your eyebrows'.<sup>159</sup> When Royland loses his divining abilities towards the close of the text, this highlights Morag's fears of writer's block, but also reinforces the idea that talent and labour are co-dependent, and these elements must exist in balance to engender success. And perhaps too, there is the suggestion in the treatment of the writing process, that credit must be placed where it is due. Talent and inspiration play an undeniable part, but having portrayed the struggle towards self-determination that is so intrinsic the *Künstlerroman*, and so doubly difficult for a female protagonist, the authors refuse to sweep their protagonists' labours away

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<sup>156</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p2.

<sup>157</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p87.

<sup>158</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p451.

<sup>159</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p451-452.

behind a curtain of Gothic inspiration. But if the process of writing has an ambiguous relationship to the Gothic, what about the product? Could the protagonists be read as participating in the same Gothic dialogue as their creators, or is their output – the inner-textual core of the *Küntslerroman* plot – in a different key altogether?

Emily's writing comes from a Romantic tradition. There is a degree of overlap with Gothic sensibilities – especially in her poetry, which focuses on sublime natural beauty – but she is not a Gothic writer per se. Emily's creative sensibility is definitely attuned to Gothic themes, but her prose writing does not appear to develop upon them. Her first published novel, *The Moral of the Rose* is characterised by 'a witty, sparkling rill of human comedy',<sup>160</sup> cheerfully pastoral and down-to-earth, complete with 'greasy dish towels',<sup>161</sup> family squabbles and celebrations: 'They laughed and scowled and wept and danced – and even made a little love'.<sup>162</sup> That coy acknowledgment that Emily's novel includes some romance is perhaps the key to understanding why, while Emily's narrative is Gothic, her oeuvre is not. Montgomery was restricted by the standards of her society and the expectations of her publishers, and could never portray Emily's sexuality as intimately as she would have wished: '[T]he public and the publisher won't allow me to write of a young girl as she really is [...] you have to depict a sweet, insipid young thing [...] yet young girls in their early teens often have some very vivid love affairs. A girl of "Emily's" type would.'<sup>163</sup> This restriction applies not just to what Emily does, but to what Emily herself *writes*, and I would posit that this constrains Emily from developing into a Gothic writer herself. Montgomery invariably adopts an arch tone when describing Emily's efforts at writing romance, that calls attention to Emily's inexperience and absolves Emily from any charge of impropriety: 'Even the "love talk" that had bothered

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<sup>160</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p145.

<sup>161</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p148.

<sup>162</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p145.

<sup>163</sup> L.M. Montgomery, *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery*, Vol.3 1921-1929, Mary Rubio & Elizabeth Waterson (Eds.) (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), p157.

her so much in the old days came easily now. Had Teddy Kent's eyes taught her so much?'<sup>164</sup> The quotation marks around 'love talk' are the grammatical equivalent of a chastity belt or a bucket of cold water, denying the possibility that Emily's work might contain a spark of real passion or sensuality. Montgomery may command this power in her own writing, but she is unable to pursue it further through Emily's.

In contrast, Del is initially determined to become a quintessentially Gothic writer. Her ambitions are almost comically vast in scope. She is going to transform what she believes to be the dull reality of Jubilee into an erotic, dramatic saga of love and tragedy – even though she must admit that 'I had not worked out all the implications of this myself, but felt they were varied and powerful'.<sup>165</sup> She takes the local scandal of a (presumably) pregnant girl's death by drowning and, to her mind, elevates it into something far more suitable for fiction, superimposing her version of events and characters over their mundane origins: 'Her name was Caroline. She came ready-made into my mind, taunting and secretive, blotting out altogether that pudgy Marion, the tennis-player. Was she a witch? Was she a nymphomaniac? Nothing so simple! She was wayward and light as a leaf.'<sup>166</sup> But when she comes into contact with the family whose past she has appropriated, her focus changes: 'And what happened, I asked myself, to Marion? Not to Caroline. *What happened to Marion?*'.<sup>167</sup> This change is pivotal to Del's future career, and marks her transformation from fantasist to potentially great writer. Her imagined novel is 'an 'unreliable structure' which cannot accommodate the multiple resistance of contingent reality'<sup>168</sup> and it is this multiplicity and co-dependency that ultimately proves far more attractive and sustainable a source of stimulation than her lazy first imaginings. Indeed, Del can be read as negotiating the first stage of Munro's own

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<sup>164</sup> Montgomery, *Emily's Quest*, p33.

<sup>165</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p243.

<sup>166</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p242.

<sup>167</sup> Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, p247. Italics in original.

<sup>168</sup> Howells, *Private and Fictional Words*, p87.

engagement with the Gothic tradition, as she challenges the superiority of established and alien tropes in favour of a reality that, she begins to appreciate, has never been flat or dull.

As an actress, Rose relates to the Gothic on a different basis, but in *Who Do You Think You Are?* Munro furthers the sense of creative complexity found in everyday human situations rather than melodramatic sagas. The most detailed description of Rose at work comes when she has a part in a soap-opera style TV series; a neat equivalent in theatrical terms for Munro's Southern Ontario Gothic. The series constitutes a version of reality that is heightened and exaggerated, but that also proposes to reflect real life, and therefore thrives on its most grotesque and curious elements. Munro describes Rose filming a scene that is directly reminiscent of Del's/Caroline's/Marion's story in *Lives of Girls and Women*: 'She had to creep around among the lifeboats, keeping an eye on a pretty young girl who was freezing in cut-off jeans and a halter. According to the script, the woman Rose played was afraid this young girl meant to jump off the boat because she was pregnant.'<sup>169</sup> This classic Gothic plot device – the fallen woman contemplating suicide – has already been filtered by Del through local scandal and melodramatic fiction, and now it is returned to with a new medium and a new degree of artifice. The actress playing the young girl is not pregnant, is not going to drown, and neither is her character: 'They didn't have things like that happening in the series'.<sup>170</sup> This quality of imitation is increased when Rose learns of a real death – her erstwhile lover Simon – and the juxtaposition is brutally effective in exposing both Rose's human powerlessness and the process of constant deception that makes her career. Munro's treatment of Rose's acting therefore develops on the idea initiated in *Lives of Girls and Women*, and furthers a sense that neither protagonist is a classic Gothic practitioner. Rather, they acknowledge the

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<sup>169</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p232.

<sup>170</sup> Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p233.

force of Gothic symbols but retain a greater interest in their 'real life' counterparts; much in the same way that Munro does herself.

Vanessa's juvenile attempts at fiction in *A Bird in the House* are firmly in the vein of Del's initial efforts, but lack the tongue-in-cheek humour that redeems the latter. Her regurgitation of Gothic melodrama is never shown to develop into anything more subtle, and especially when compared to the artistic progress made by the other protagonists, this reinforces the sense of Vanessa's writing as immature and abandoned rather than as a potential career path. Her lack of persistence reveals her to be doubly distanced from the Gothic – she is neither compulsively inspired in the traditional fashion, nor motivated to regenerate her fictions so that they can be both Gothic *and* relevant to her experiences. In *The Diviners*, Morag's first attempts at fiction are rooted in similar clichés – such as her short story 'Wild Roses', the full text of which was included in the first drafts of *The Diviners*. Morag dismisses the story as 'sentimental' and 'overdone'<sup>171</sup>, but crucially, she asks herself 'Could it be changed?',<sup>172</sup> an early indicator of her commitment to improving her writing. It is difficult to evaluate Morag as a potentially Gothic writer; after describing in detail the plot and production of *Spear of Innocence*, Laurence provides less and less detail about Morag's subsequent work. It is difficult to categorise her writing in generic terms, as the little information provided suggests that she is a bold and experimental writer, who tackles a diverse range of projects from a re-working of *The Tempest* to a collection to short stories to the Biblically suggestive novels *Jonah* and *Shadow of Eden*. In Munro's *Künstlerroman* narratives, there is the suggestion that the protagonists will emulate Munro's own re-interpretive approach to the Gothic, but it is harder to fully support a case for this with Laurence and Morag. Howells has suggested that *The Diviners*' signature water imagery makes it especially difficult to evaluate Morag's career: 'her statements of achievement are somewhat destabilized by the pervasive images of water

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<sup>171</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p124.

<sup>172</sup> Laurence, *The Diviners*, p124.

which she uses'.<sup>173</sup> Yet I would argue that the elusive and unstable quality this imagery suggests is in fact a strength of Morag's writing, and her body of work has a multiplicity to it that, while it may not fit completely into a pattern of Gothic engagement, suggests a talented and versatile writer who would be fully aware of its nuances.

When considering how the Gothic elements of the texts relate specifically to the narrative drive of the *Künstlerroman* narrative, it is important to reiterate the lack of direct correlation between the writers' deployment of the Gothic and that of their protagonists. Each writer negotiates the Gothic to different effect, and rather than have their characters passively emulate their own progress, they allow the possibility that theirs is not the only way in which to re-work a tradition steeped in the values of eighteenth-century Europe within an explicitly twentieth-century Canadian context. It has been frequently observed that Canadian women's writing is paradoxically recognisable by both its dominant themes *and* its diversity: 'The patterns of resistance that emerge to externally imposed systems of classification and definition are both characteristically Canadian and characteristically feminine',<sup>174</sup> and this observation holds true in the final evaluation of the Gothic. In allowing their characters to enter into this multiplicity with their individual treatments of the Gothic, the writers call attention to the subtlety and complexity of the genre tradition, as well as highlighting their own participation in this tradition, and ultimately emphasising its potential for continuous reinterpretation.

For in the final analysis, this concept of reinterpretation is crucial, both to appreciating the complexity of the Gothic literary tradition, and to recognising its particular aptness as the underlying stylistic genre of the twentieth-century Canadian female *Künstlerroman*. Firstly, it is apparent in the writers' re-appropriation of Classic Gothic for subversive effect, as they undermine conventions with a tactical re-working of the genre's more clichéd excesses. This emphasises both their individual and their

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<sup>173</sup> Howells, *Private and Fictional Words*, p51.

<sup>174</sup> Howells, *Private and Fictional Words*, p10.

national autonomy, and shifts away from the established traditions of eighteenth-century European writing to the development of a Gothic literature that is unmistakably twentieth-century Canadian. They regenerate the Gothic in this national context, and it provides a sense of literary depth and texture to their narratives. In the *Emily* trilogy, the psychic episodes are a strikingly original device that allows Montgomery to transgress the borders of suitability for 'a writer for young people' and develop a darker sense of menace within the texts. Munro's participation is crucial in the development of Southern Ontario Gothic, where her regional reinterpretation unleashes the latent Gothic potential in the dry, rural towns of Ontario rather than the mountains of the Mediterranean. And Laurence's epic imagination of a prairie Gothic allows for a more politically inclusive, post-colonial branch of Gothic imagination to flourish. These different approaches to reinterpreting the Gothic are showcased to their best effect in the treatment of masculinities. Gothic imagery is invoked to demonstrate that in the context of the Canadian *Künstlerroman*, male villains may no longer pose a directly sexual threat to the female artist protagonist (although, perhaps more disturbingly, they operate within consensual romantic and sexual relationships), but instead they constitute a more subtle and sinister threat to her creative autonomy. Dean's psychological manipulation of Emily, Garnet's desire to control Del, Patrick's stifling of Rose and Brooke's compulsion to infantilise Morag, all represent this new manifestation of masculine menace to chilling effect. And yet, in the finest Gothic tradition, the protagonists do not succumb. They all succeed in liberating themselves from the prospect or state of marital incarceration and continue with their careers. And of course, it is in the representation of their careers that the dynamic between the Canadian *Künstlerroman* and the Canadian Gothic flourishes. For, while the protagonists may not explicitly engage with the Gothic, their creativity is nevertheless informed and influenced by an awareness of it, and this relationship reiterates again the driving themes of this study: the strength and diversity of Canadian



women's writing, its thriving tradition of intertextuality, and the exploration of these themes via the reinterpretation of the *Künstlerroman*.

## *Conclusion*

### *Conceptualising the Canadian*

### *Künstlerroman*

*So much for endings. Beginnings are always more fun. True connoisseurs, however, are known to favour the stretch in between, since it's the hardest thing to do anything with.*

*That's about all that can be said for plots, which anyway are just one thing after another, a what and a what and a what.*

*Now try How and Why.*

*~ Margaret Atwood*

Throughout this thesis, I have negotiated with areas of thematic interest that are repeatedly characterised by their inherent instability: Canadian literature is diverse and multiplicitous; Canadian landscape is dauntingly unpredictable; the *Künstlerroman* narrative can present in an infinite variety of manifestations and the Gothic is a genre that thrives on secrecy and contradiction. With this accumulation of precarious variability in mind, it is unfeasible to conclude by offering definitive certainties to the myriad questions posed. And yet it is equally unfeasible to end without drawing together some of the key ideas that have persistently emerged throughout the preceding chapters. Through consolidating the themes that incepted the thesis, this final section considers how national and gendered literary identities can come into synthesis, how women writers can explore the conditions of their personal and professional experience, and how their narratives combine and connect with each other to establish a forum in which to address these same issues. That forum is the Canadian female *Künstlerroman*, and therefore the concluding pages of this thesis are dedicated to identifying its key characteristics, and how they are utilised within the texts considered.

### Portraits of the Artist as...?

Previous studies of the *Künstlerroman* have tended to emphasise how narrative conventions construct a clearly recognisable type of protagonist. Marcus Beebe in *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts* (1964) not only considers that ‘every artist is a man [sic]’<sup>1</sup> but indeed that he is ‘always the same man [sic]’;<sup>2</sup> perceptive, intelligent, self-centred, submissive, and terminally misunderstood. Linda Huf’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman* (1985) proposed a set of rigid criteria – five rules that can be universally applied to any manifestation of the female *Künstlerroman* – as well as constructing the

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<sup>1</sup> Marcus Beebe, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), p313.

<sup>2</sup> Beebe, *Ivory Towers*, p299.

protagonists' characterisation in terms that are merely antithetical to Beebe's: 'Artist heroines by women are athletic in build, skilled in sports, unshrinking in fights, able in mathematics, plucky in love, and daring in their sexual adventures.'<sup>3</sup> Even Carl D. Malmgren's altogether more flexible model of characterisation is propelled by an assumption of universal applicability, whereby all *Künstlerroman* protagonists will share at least three defining common factors.

These latter two models have proved useful in my readings of the texts, and yet they are by no means definitive. Despite areas of commonality with critical criteria, the five protagonists considered in this study are best understood as complex individuals rather than types or ciphers. Emily is socially shy but possessed of innate self-belief. She is frequently rebellious, and yet she is also in many ways a very traditional young woman of her class and background – her attitude to Perry Miller encapsulates an element of latent snobbery, and she has a skilful command of domestic chores and feminine arts. Del is fiercely bright, but frequently apathetic, achieving her academic success with a minimum of effort and struggling to decide on the course of her life. She is shrewd and perceptive, but her curiosity frequently leads her into potentially dangerous relationships – and while the situation with Mr. Chamberlain may be the most obvious example of this, it is her liaison with Garnet that comes closest to threatening her sense of self. Rose is distinguished by her chosen metier – she is an actress rather than a writer – and this is reflected in her dramatic, apparently spontaneous personality. She is attuned to emotional rather than literary possibilities, and maintains her persona on and off stage, unable to resist when life provides the opportunity to play the romantic lead, as in her relationships with Patrick and Simon. Vanessa, whose development is curtailed by her narrative, is strikingly isolated and insecure, as a series of bereavements shatter her childish self-confidence. She is increasingly characterised by withdrawal and dependence on her

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<sup>3</sup> Linda Huf, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman* (New York: Frederick Unger, 1985) p4.

family, and her actual personality is unusually vague. Lastly, Morag's characterisation represents the most complete psychological portrait of the creative woman within this study, as her personality is convincingly developed from pugnacious childhood to wry middle-age.

There are undeniably common factors that appear in all the narratives, and certain plot devices are used repeatedly across the board. For example, only one protagonist is fortunate enough to retain both parents for the duration of her childhood, while three are orphaned completely and one loses her father. Emily's family background is dauntingly respectable and she grows up in material comfort (but not luxury), and Vanessa's paternal grandmother has pretensions towards a lost gentility and social standing, but Del and Rose are emphatically working-class, and Morag is raised on the impoverished margins of the Manawaka community. And yet despite a degree of similarity in background and ambition, each of the five clearly emerges as an individual. It would seem that in the Canadian *Künstlerroman*, the determination and wit the protagonist must possess to achieve her goals will inevitably make her a memorable, stand-out character rather than a blank cipher or stereotype. Therefore, in light of my observations as to the instability of the factors considered through this thesis, it seems paradoxically fitting that in the Canadian female *Künstlerroman*, the protagonist is recognisable because she is unique, and distinguished by her individuality rather than conforming neatly to any set criteria.

### **Romance versus Resilience**

Given the *Künstlerroman*'s philosophical origins in the German enlightenment, and its subsequent popularity in European Romanticism, it is hardly surprising that the protagonist is frequently characterised in highly Romantic terms as a uniquely gifted and special individual, alienated from mainstream society by their sensitivity and talent. As

Malmgren phrases it 'the artist is a marked man [sic]'.<sup>4</sup> However, this method of characterisation has all too frequently resulted in negative consequences for female *Künstlerroman* protagonist: Huf insists that they invariably struggle to reconcile personal and professional fulfilment, and are forced to make the stark choice between creativity and procreativity. The difficulty of these decisions, especially when combined with the invariable lack of support and understanding the female protagonists receive from male lovers and/or husbands, contributes to the stereotype of the female *Künstlerroman* protagonist as predisposed to depression and failure. For example, Huf's study includes Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), whose protagonist commits suicide, and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963), whose protagonist attempts suicide and is committed to an asylum. Both these texts are cited as exemplary renditions of the female *Künstlerroman*, but there is an inherent danger in this type of association. The female *Künstlerroman* should be the narrative of the woman as artist, not the woman as victim.

Therefore, it is profoundly refreshing to find that the protagonists considered in my study are altogether more resilient, particularly when it comes to their dealings with men. Emily defies social and familial expectation in breaking off her destructive engagement with Dean, and while her eventual marriage to Teddy is an anti-climax romantically, he at least does not pose a serious threat to her career. He may be uninspiring, but the feature of Emily's art is that, unlike Teddy, she does not need an external muse: she has inspired herself, and will continue to do so. Del is 'in love with love' and seduced by the drama of her relationship with Garnet, but the moment she perceives his intentions are serious, the spell is broken and her autonomy is restored. Rose emerges from a physically violent and mentally draining marriage without recourse to psychiatry, alcohol, long solitary walks in the wilderness, or indeed any of the usual tools that are utilised by a traditionally tortured artist. The details of Vanessa's adult life

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<sup>4</sup> Carl D. Malmgren, 'From Work to Text: The Modernist and Postmodernist *Künstlerroman*', *A Forum on Fiction* Vol.21, No.1 (Autumn, 1987) p6.

are shadowy, but as a teenager she is dejected rather than devastated when she learns that her boyfriend is already married. Morag breaks away from her stifling marriage to Brooke, and is pragmatic in her subsequent relationships with Jules and Dan. She explicitly wants a child, and makes the choice to become a single parent rather than lose her chance at motherhood, a difficult decision, but one that undercuts the unhelpful polarity of Huf's 'either/or' principle. Furthermore, with the potential exception of the *Emily* trilogy, none of the narratives conclude by presenting the protagonist in a stable relationship,<sup>5</sup> but the effect of this is not admonitory or depressing. Rather, it is liberating – to different degrees, the writers all reject both the myth of the 'tortured artist' and the convention that a 'happy-ending' for a women must involve a man. Instead of the overblown, technicolor melodrama of the female artist as a delicate and misunderstood soul in a cruel world, a far more subtle and nuanced portrait emerges of the artist as determined, capable and resilient. She is not immune to emotion, or unaffected by desire, but nor is she driven to the cocktail/medicine cabinet every time a lover lets her down, or a critic pens a vicious review. And, in choosing to break away from the Romantic tradition of the misunderstood artist, and the stereotype of the creative woman as crazy/suicidal, the writers of the Canadian female *Künstlerroman* not only offer a more representative portrayal of their protagonists as women, but a far more revelatory portrayal of their existence as writers.

### **Female Friendships**

It is a critical necessity that it is not enough to identify that the twentieth-century Canadian *Künstlerroman* avoids the usual pitfalls of stereotyping the artist as mad or misunderstood: one must also identify just how the writers can negate this tradition. Throughout this thesis, I have established that a significant component in this process is

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<sup>5</sup> Emily is, after all, presented as engaged rather than irrevocably married, and while Vanessa may have a partner, he is never mentioned during her brief return to Manawaka.

the portrayal of female friendship and support. While Huf proposes that any female-relationship dynamic to the *Künstlerroman* is driven by competition and jealousy, I have found that this negates the intrinsic support and understanding that other women can offer the protagonist. Emily struggles to confide in anyone, including her friends and family, but they nevertheless support and validate her creative identity. Ilse responds positively to an early recitation, and is consistently unequivocal in her support of Emily as a writer. Janet Royal not only offers the opportunity of a lifetime, but is incredibly gracious when it is refused. And even Aunt Elizabeth comes to appreciate her niece's rare and special talent. Del's narrative is curtailed before she can fully acknowledge her mother's influence, and yet within the text it is strikingly apparent that Addie's daughter has inherited more than she cares to admit. And at a point in the narrative when Del is most at risk of succumbing to Garnet's dubious long-term charms, her old friend Naomi is at hand to offer a sympathetic warning of the likely consequences. Rose's friendship with Jocelyn enables her to articulate previously suppressed feelings about her marriage, and their connection proves strong enough to survive even Rose's relationship with Jocelyn's husband. Within the apparent patriarchy of her family, Vanessa appreciates the undercurrent of female solidarity that initially exists between her mother and her Aunt Edna, but eventually comes to encompass herself. And Morag is touched and amazed, firstly by the lifelong friendship she develops with the equally talented and creative Ella, and secondly by the unconditional support that Ella's mother and sisters are happy to extend to her.

This foregrounding of female friendship could be read as a response to the previously covered unreliability of the male love-interests: one could posit that they develop these platonic, female relationships in response to the shortcomings of their sexual relationships with men. But this model clearly fails when remembering the



chronology of the narratives. Emily meets and loves Ilse long before she meets and likes Dean. Del admires Naomi's (admittedly misinformed) frankness about sex before she puts it into practice with Garnet. Rose first meets Jocelyn at a crucial point in both of their lives – they are on the same maternity ward when they deliver their children – and further betrayals are insignificant by comparison. Vanessa grows up attuned to a female conspiracy that skirts skilfully around the edges of male expectation. Morag gains the crucial confidence in her creative abilities from Eva, preceding her (temporary) acceptance of Brooke's judgement. Therefore, my reading proposes that female networks of support do not merely precede male validation: they transcend it. That is not to say these friendships are idealised – there are undercurrents of tension, there are quarrels and misunderstandings and upsets – but this only reinforces the realism. Through their portrayal of female friendship and support, the writers engage with an emotional truth that further undermines the myth of the isolated artist, as well as revealing dimensions to their protagonists that go beyond the roles of wife or lover. The focus on relationships between women is therefore an enlightening and essential component of the Canadian female *Künstlerroman*, and one that would certainly merit more critical attention than it has previously received.

### **Intertextual Identities**

This last factor is arguably the most important to consider in the construction of the Canadian female *Künstlerroman*. All the narratives included in the study actively participate in and further a sense of intertextual discourse, whilst also promoting the philosophies that arise from this discourse within their own innertextual frameworks. Intrinsic connections are thus established between themes of gender, national and cultural identities, and all three writers testify not only to the complexity of this relationship, but

also to its rich potential as a source of creative inspiration. The use of Canadian landscape and location signals the national emphasis of all the narratives: country and culture are placed under a critical spotlight and the concept of Canadian national identity is constantly interrogated. Meanwhile, literary identity is established through the multifaceted deployment of intertextual reference and reinterpretation, especially when the texts participate in subverting or regenerating the Gothic genre.

While the intertextual dynamics are primarily female and Canadian, this is not always a simultaneous condition, as each individual point of reference does not have to fulfil both criteria. Indeed, part of the interest comes from the contrast between masculine or non-Canadian textual perspectives. Montgomery's use of *Jane Eyre* is an exemplary demonstration of this dual process. On the one hand, the connections between the *Emily* trilogy and *Jane Eyre* highlight a cultural legacy of women's writing, and create a bond between the texts. But the points of departure – especially Emily's escape from the spare room – highlight that the narrative has been relocated as well as rewritten, and that Emily's actions reflect her culture as much as her personality. Similarly, the parallels between the structure of *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* establish a playful sense of counterpoint between the narratives. And in *The Diviners*, the similarities between Pique and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*'s Emily St. Aubert signal a politicised and contemporary reinterpretation of traditional Gothic tropes.

However, it is through the presentation of intertextual relationships within the field of Canadian women's writing that this element of the Canadian female *Künstlerroman* is at its strongest and most insightful, and this is reflected in the innertextual world of the protagonists' own literary achievements. Emily rejects the opportunity for instant success in New York and waits until she can establish herself as a Canadian writer. Munro has frequently praised the *Emily* trilogy, and wrote the 'Afterword' for the New Canadian

Library edition of *Emily of New Moon*. Morag enters into intense, imaginary debates with Catherine Parr Traill. This alternation between writers and protagonists may well appear odd, but it is entirely appropriate when appreciating the complexity of the inter and innertextual components to the Canadian female *Künstlerroman*. This is a narrative pattern that is characterised by a metafictional self-awareness as well as a passionate commitment to Canadian women's writing, and a desire to further debates about Canadian cultural identity. Furthermore, in charting the connections that are formed both between and within the Canadian female *Künstlerroman*, this thesis reinforces the sense of female ascendancy over Canadian literature. For, not only are the writers actively engaged in debate with their predecessors and dialogue with their contemporaries, but so too are their protagonists. The intertextual dynamics of the female Canadian *Künstlerroman* – which ultimately echo nothing more than the supportive and stimulating relationship that Laurence portrays between Morag and Ella in *The Diviners* – thus provide a means of expression about and understanding of Canadian literary culture that extends back to its earliest participants.

Finally then, this thesis set out to establish the Canadian female *Künstlerroman* as a valid and varied narrative pattern, that has been re-worked to tremendous effect by a succession of writers. Through charting how Montgomery, Munro and Laurence have engaged with and redefined the genre through their emphasis on the protagonists' individuality and resilience, as well as their sensitive readings of female friendships and multifaceted approach to intertextual and metafictional dynamics, that initial objective has been extended. The thesis closes with the proposition that the Canadian female *Künstlerroman* has significance and value that goes beyond my initial evaluation. It has proven itself one of the most persistently intriguing and influential narrative structures in twentieth-century Canadian women's writing and it will be fascinating to see how it is developed in the twenty-first.

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