

L. M. Montgomery's Manuscript Revisions

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ABSTRACT

Elizabeth Epperly's study of Lucy Maud Montgomery's manuscripts shows not only Montgomery's writing practices and processes, but also her deliberate assembly of revealing personal clues.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans son étude des manuscrits de Lucy Maud Montgomery, Elizabeth Epperly fait ressortir les pratiques et le travail d'écriture de cette auteure, et elle montre en outre comment celle-ci a délibérément travaillé à réunir des indices personnels révélateurs.

Many of the thrills of reading A.S. Byatt's novel Possession come from the detective work involved in investigating original manuscripts. On a routine trip to the London Library Roland discovers amid manuscript notes the secret love affair of a famous Nineteenth-Century poet. Anyone who has studied manuscripts knows the excitement of finding out something intimate about the writer in the changes of ink and slant of the words, in the crossings out and the additions, in the marginal notations and in the quality and care of the papers themselves. Thirteen years ago I began to work with Lucy Maud Montgomery's fifteen novel manuscripts owned by the Confederation Centre of the Arts in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, and found out things about her methods and choices I would not have suspected. Montgomery's secret affair was with system; she devised a tidy scheme for making additions and changes on the manuscripts and then wrestled with the system as her heroines and personal circumstances became

more complicated.

Each of the manuscripts has its own peculiarities and patterns, but we can understand much about the scope and quality of Montgomery's revision scheme by looking at some significant places in the two initial novels of her most successful series — Anne of Green Gables and Emily of New Moon. The radical differences between Anne and Emily and in Montgomery's circumstances in creating them are reflected in the kinds of changes Montgomery made to the manuscripts and to her system of revision.

The fifteen manuscripts consist of odd-sized and variously shaped bundles of pages — some yellow and brittle and some neatly de-acidified, with Montgomery's rounded hand sometimes plainly legible and other times all but unreadable, with ink in thin and thick flow and the slant as capricious as the waves on a windy day in Cavendish. Montgomery was a careful conserver and reused pages. For only a few of the manuscripts did she use clean sheets of paper

and write on front and back. She wrote on the backs of her own typescripts, using, for example, the typescripts for stories that eventually appeared in Chronicles of Avonlea (1912) to write Anne of Green Gables (1908) or using a carbon of the typescript for Anne of Green Gables for her final novel Anne of Ingleside, published more than thirty years later in 1939. She also wrote on her husband Ewan's sermons, on fan letters, on her children's school lectures and examination booklets, on advertising and investment letters, on typescripts of poems (some of them signed with her early pen names Maud Eglington and Maud Cavendish), on church circulars, and on Toronto Women's Press Club notices. The manuscripts vary in size — she even used different sizes of sheets within the same bundle. For example, half of Anne of the Island was written on the 8 ½ by 11 typescript pages for The Golden Road and the other half of Anne of the Island is on front to back 6 by 8 letter-sized pages. Few of the sheets of Jane of Lantern Hill are exactly the same size since she used letters, circulars, typescripts, and sermons — most of them torn in half — for paper. One spends hours piecing together bits of Montgomery's life from the clues revealed on the backs of these scraps, sometimes more intrigued by the scraps than by the unfolding story on the reverse side.

Early in her career, when writing short stories, Montgomery established the revision technique she was to use with all of her novels. Rather than make long additions on the original pages of the story she was writing, she simply marked a place for the addition with the word "Note" and a letter of the alphabet. Usually she dropped the word "Note" somewhere along in the first run of the alphabet, and then used only a letter and its corresponding sequence number. After completing the alphabet the first time, she would follow with A1 through Z1 and then A2 through Z2 and so on, going through the alphabet as many as twenty-five times for one novel. The additions were written

out on separate sheets and were kept at the end of a manuscript. Montgomery worked through a story, making minor local adjustments and additions directly on the page with a crossing through and/or a carat and using the alphabet system for additions and changes she wanted to make after a day's writing or indeed at any time in writing the story. In the early manuscripts the alphabet notations are clear and orderly, but in later manuscripts the alphabet notations for a single page can be staggeringly varied: P23 may be followed by B12 and that followed by Z19. And sometimes, in the later novels, these black ink and pencil alphabet notations are accompanied by new red ink letters and numbers, clearly meant to supersede all other notations, but contradicting themselves with repetitions and re-ordering.

In theory the system was tidy and effortless. In practice, it became as elaborate and complex as the narratives. The differences between the novels before and after marriage and before and after the First World War suggest the strains of keeping the complicated self-editorial process in Montgomery's increasingly difficult private life from leaking into the apparently effortless and straightforward style she had established as her literary hallmark.

In 1914 Montgomery recalled penning the opening paragraphs of Anne of Green Gables almost ten years earlier. She remembered tossing them off easily and happily and then being interrupted by Ewan, who was making the first visit of what was to become a courtship. She knew she had already done what for her was the hardest part of the story — the opening — and she had done so with energy and joy¹. The manuscript corroborates her recollection. The writing is remarkably free from additions or alterations. The famous opening one hundred and forty-eight word sentence of the printed Anne of Green Gables² was originally in manuscript two sentences, broken almost exactly half way through. The wording of the original and printed versions are almost identical. Notes A and

B appear in this first sentence but they add only two phrases: “fringed with alders and ladies’ eardrops and” as well as “from brooks and children up.”³ The local adjustments include a colon in place of the first printed semi-colon and the words “or out of place” added with a carat. The handwriting is clear, cheerfully rounded, and from the uniform slant and quality of the ink, evidently dashed off quickly. In fact, the entire first chapter and much of the manuscript as a whole show the same kinds of ease and speed. She makes small additions of phrases throughout the first chapter, but not one of them changes the narrative line or substantially alters the quality of description or dialogue. The chapter has alphabetic notes A through X, in order, and additions only of phrases or an odd sentence. Montgomery obviously had the story line firmly in mind and made the few local and extra changes while she was composing or shortly afterwards.

The few manuscript changes in this opening chapter — and the consistently minor additions made to dialogue, description, and narrative throughout — confirm what Montgomery herself suggested in describing the process she used for composition. Like Anthony Trollope, who took long walks and rehearsed dialogues and scenes and the produced pages virtually untouched in revision⁴, Montgomery knew exactly where she was going before she wrote. In her journals and letters she talked about “brooding up” a heroine and “blocking out” scenes and chapters. Though we do not have the plans for Anne of Green Gables we have a few of them for Rainbow Valley⁵ and Mistress Pat⁶ and they suggest what even the most chaotically revised manuscripts show: the main story and the principal scenes were absolutely clear ahead of time. In Anne of Green Gables this means that even an exciting chapter such as “An Unfortunate Lily Maid,” where Anne plays Elaine, nearly drowns, and is rescued by Gilbert Blythe or the chapter called “Where the Brook and River Meet,” that shows the transition from girlhood to young womanhood, are

virtually without major changes. Some colourful expressions are added in both cases. In “An Unfortunate Lily Maid” when Anne is lamenting the loss of her play place Idlewild, Montgomery adds these words to a sentence talking about her consolation: “not without an eye to the romance of it.”⁷ In “Where the Brook and the River Meet”, after Marilla has asked Anne why she has quietened down and Anne has told her that she now prefers to keep many of her dear thoughts to herself rather than have them laughed at or wondered over, Montgomery adds a longish paragraph with Marilla asking about the fate of the old story club and has Anne explain about it. But in both cases, though the additions enrich the narrative, the main story was already clearly established.

There are, in fact, only two really long additions to the entire manuscript, and they both occur in the famous raspberry scene in the chapter “Diana is Invited to Tea with Tragic Results,” where Anne unwittingly gets Diana drunk by giving her currant wine rather than the brightly coloured and harmless raspberry drink. These two additions come almost immediately together and provide a needed distraction from and sufficient time for Diana’s swallowing of three generous tumblers of wine. In the original manuscript version Anne is chattering as Diana drinks, but there is little time for us to focus away from Diana. The manuscript reads:

The last time I made a cake I forgot to put the flour in. Flour is so essential in cakes, you know. Marilla was very cross and I don’t wonder. I’m a great trial to her. Why, Diana, what is the matter?⁸

The appended notes extend the scene considerably and give us a rich helping of Anne’s monologue. Between “The last time I made cake and forgot to put the flour in” and “Flour is so essential to cakes, you know”

Montgomery added one hundred and eighteen words describing in detail Anne's romantic daydream about Diana dying of smallpox and Anne's rescuing of her that had distracted Anne from putting flour in the cake. And then, right after Anne says of Marilla, "I'm a great trial to her", Montgomery adds four hundred and seventy-four words in which Anne describes her dreadful ordeal with the mouse in the pudding sauce, another important instance —thematically— where Anne's good imagination borrows indiscriminately from romance literature and brings her to grief in the prosaic world around her. The printed version of the scene, containing the 592 words of the two added notes, gives us a wonderful comic byplay that then fits together well with Anne's other trials and ordeals over growing up in staid Avonlea.

Throughout Anne of Green Gables the additions offer vividness and humour. But perhaps the most interesting intimate detail the manuscript reveals —for Anne fans— is that Anne's bosom friend was originally Laura and even Gertrude before Montgomery settled on Diana.⁹

In 1920, having just completed Rilla of Ingleside, Montgomery made a "dark and deadly vow" in her journal that she was finished with Anne forever. She said that she had been thinking about a new heroine and, sick of Anne, she wanted to do a new kind of writing.¹⁰ At first glance, the manuscript for Emily of New Moon,¹¹ published in 1923, is as different from the manuscript of Anne of Green Gables as the Montgomery of her thirties was different from the Montgomery of her forties. Since writing Green Gables, Montgomery had married and moved to Ontario, given birth to three children — one of whom only lived a day — written seven more novels, lived through the First World War and the death of her dearest friend and cousin Frederica Campbell MacFarlane, discovered that her husband's mental illness was recurrent and made him abhorrent to her, and embarked on a lengthy and expensive lawsuit with the L.C. Page

Company of Boston. The world she had known and loved on Prince Edward Island had disappeared and her life as a minister's wife in rural Ontario was often filled with disappointment and bitterness. In 1920, as she brooded up her new heroine, Emily Byrd Starr, she was also copying into uniform-sized ledgers the journal she had kept since her teens on P.E.I. Emily's story is largely autobiographical; it is important to remember how closely Montgomery was reviewing her own past as she created Emily's attitudes and actions and may explain why there are so many local changes and later additions in the Emily manuscript.

The 716 page Anne of Green Gables manuscript is a neat stack of de-acidified sheets of fairly legible script. The chaotically numbered 400 pages of Emily of New Moon, on legal-sized and 8 ½ sheets mixed, are yellow and brittle and have not been de-acidified because the porousness of the lined paper would make the ink run. In Anne of Green Gables, Montgomery works steadily through the alphabet, making additions in order so that she can follow right through from Note A to S19 in the text as well as on the 137 pages of appended notes; in Emily of New Moon the alphabet notations are seldom in order though they do appear in clusters — Notes A, B, C, D, E, and G all appear in the first chapter, but so do G20, N1, K2 and O. The alphabet for any one number is not necessarily complete and later numbers in an alphabet may be superseded by new notations in red ink. The note pages are missing. I had hoped to be able to trace Montgomery's process of revision by pursuing each of the alphabet lists and discovering a pattern to them. But, as in Green Gables, here too the additions may be bits of dialogue, description, or narrative. There is no pattern to the kinds of things added except that they are always helpful and colourful details. Clusters of changes that follow roughly the same alphabet order are the most dissimilar in subject and nature. Some of the higher numbers — the late teens and twenties — that are scattered throughout the manuscript may occasionally



L.M. Montgomery. Photo courtesy of the Anne of Green Gables Museum (the Campbell family).

show some similarity in subject, as though Montgomery may have been thinking about a particular character or scenes relating to him or her and decided to make a series of additions and changes. For example, Q23, R23, S23, U23, and V23 (there is no T23), which appear on pages 22, 440, 51, 65, and 75 respectively, have to do with cousin Jimmy — he is being described, is speaking or is present conspicuously in the scene involved. But P23, which precedes this cluster, deals with Emily's father and Y23 (there is no W23 or X23) describes Emily's garret retreat.

From first to last the meticulous changes are virtually without pattern. Note A is the first addition to the manuscript, but note T19 appears on the last page, while D25 is the highest notation number and it appears back on page 337 of the printed novel's 351 pages.¹²

Again, as in Green Gables, it is obvious that Montgomery had the entire story in mind while she wrote. Nevertheless, there are more long additions in this novel than in Green Gables — the additions amounting to more than 23,000 words of the novel's approximately 120,000, whereas in Green Gables we find roughly a third of this number of additions.

Some of the highest concentrations of changes and additions occur in Emily's letters to her father; interestingly, these are the parts of the novel that also have much direct autobiography. Chapter IX, "A Special Providence," is filled with facts Montgomery lifted from her own journal account of her childhood in Cavendish, and this chapter has a riot of alphabetical additions. Here Emily begins to write letters to her dead father, addressing them to "Mr. Douglas Starr, On the Road to Heaven" — just as the child Montgomery had addressed letters on precious letter bills to her dead mother. The letter to her father contains nineteen additions; one describing Emily's friendship with Rhoda Stuart is 680 words long, but the others range from seven to seventy-five words, in this bewildering sequence: A21, A24, V4, N4, W3, D4,

J5, F21, E5, D21, I5, F4, Y20, J4, E21, R4, Z3, A4, and G21. Whatever pattern Montgomery was following, it is certain that she took great care with the autobiographical additions and went over the additions themselves many times as she polished Emily's story.

The opening paragraphs of Emily of New Moon were added later, though the original paragraphs are included immediately after them. Several of the names were changed later in red ink: the Murrays were originally the Cliffords; Blair Water was Allan Water, then Lynn Water; most interesting is that Dean Priest was for some time Dean Temple¹³ though the Priest clan and Priest Pond are original names, as though Montgomery may have intended him to be a more distant cousin at first though she retained the suggestion of sacred and mysterious (while perhaps adding the patriarchal) in switching to Priest for Dean's surname. The scenes of most drama and emotion — Emily's rescue by Dean, her battle with Aunt Elizabeth over her letters, her psychic vision of Ilse's mother — all have remarkably few additions and certainly no additions that suggest any shift in focus or theme.

What do we learn from Montgomery as a writer from looking at the manuscripts? We find how conscientiously she planned the novels, how carefully she went over them, how quickly and how slowly she wrote, how readily and how accurately she called to mind lines from her favourite authors, how frequently she tested names for people and places until she found what she wanted. The legibility of her handwriting deteriorates with time and yet when she is describing her own favourite recollections in Jane of Lantern Hill, the penultimate completed novel published in 1937, her handwriting can be as legible as the best passages in Green Gables. What she chose to preserve for writing stock is itself worth study, as I have suggested, for we can be startled to find her preserving Ewan's caustic remarks about parishioners alongside a carbon copy of her own confidential medical assessment of his mental illness. Montgomery may not have been reli-

able about page numberings and alphabetical sequences, but I cannot believe this canny woman, who was always looking ahead and writing ahead to her posthumous audience, did not know exactly what trove she was leaving for the A.S. Bayatt characters of cur-

rent academe. Each manuscript reveals something fresh about Montgomery's prolonged affair with system; each story tells us something special about the way this intensely private woman interlaced public and private texts.

NOTES

1. The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery Volume II: 1910-1921. Ed Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston. Toronto: Oxford U.P., 1987, 147

2. Anne of Green Gables. 1908. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart. New Canadian Library edition. 1992

3. Confederation Centre CM 67.5.1 Notes p.1

4. Anthony Trollope, "A Walk in the Wood", Good Words, 20 (1879), 595-600

5. Confederation Centre, CM 78.5.2

6. Confederation Centre, CM 78.5.6

7. Confederation Centre, CM 67.5.1 Notes p. 113

8. Confederation Centre, CM 67.5.1 . 273

9. Confederation Centre, CM 67.5.1. 46

10. Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery, Volume II, 390

11. Confederation Centre, CM 67.5.8

12. Emily of New Moon, 1923. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1925.

13. Confederation Centre CM 67.5.8.357 (rewritten in red ink as 337)

