

Undoubtedly Wagner may have been hampered by an inability to secure clear rights to plays for this period. One play which might have been a particularly felicitous choice for a text to be used in conjunction with a Women's Literature course is *Crows* by Betti Primrose Sandiford. *Crows* won first prize in a playwriting competition sponsored by the Women's Canadian Club of Toronto and was subsequently published in *The Canadian Magazine*, 58:5 (March 1922). Its theme is the clash between a blind old Canadian farmer, born in England, but fervently attached to his Canadian home, and his daughter-in-law, a hard and unsympathetic English war bride who had married his son during his World War I service in England. Contemporary critics considered her role an accurate portrayal of a certain "class of brides brought back to Canada by Canadian soldiers" and warned that "the portrait may cause some controversy." *Crows* would not only provide the collection with the issue of the war bride for discussion, but also provide the farm life of the 1920s as depicted in *Crows* for comparison with Ringwood's farm life of the 1930s in *Pasque Flower*.

The thirties witnessed tremendous involvement by women seeking to create their own drama. College-educated young women graduating in the late 1920s assumed career roles in the 1930's. Several of such women—Virginia Coyne Knight, Lois Reynolds Kerr, Dora Smith Conover, Mary Frederica (McLean) Farquarson—created the Playwrights' Studio Group in Toronto during the 1930s to direct and produce their own plays. These women attempted to create a uniquely Canadian drama. The exclusion of their work from this volume can only be a weakness.

This criticism of the lacunae in *Women Pioneers*, however, must not detract from the

valuable contribution Wagner and CTR Publication has made to our expanding awareness of the breadth and extent of Canadian dramatic history. Theatre and drama mirror life; the glass held to us by *Pioneer Women* reflects Canadian life, still with shadows, but shadows which more collections like this one will help to dispel.

Patrick B. O'Neill  
Mt. St. Vincent University

**My Dear Mr. M: Letters to G.B. MacMillan from L.M. Montgomery.** Edited by Francis W.P. Bolger and Elizabeth R. Epperly. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1980, Pp. 212.

As a famous writer and the wife of a small town minister, L.M. Montgomery was subject to constant demands. Drove of tourists wanted to meet the creator of "Anne," and local women's groups were always requesting her presence for recitations, church socials and Ladies' Aid meetings. Montgomery possessed a strong, Victorian concept of duty and performed all of her obligations with unwearied graciousness, but with very few did she share her real opinions or personality.

In her years of literary correspondence with two men, Ephraim Weber of Alberta and George Boyd MacMillan of Scotland, readers will discover a more sophisticated and multi-faceted Montgomery than the one usually evident in her novels. With MacMillan in particular, she maintained a frank exchange of ideas from 1903 until shortly before her death in 1942. The letters had remained undisturbed for years in the possession of MacMillan's nephew, and were only recently discovered by Mollie Gillen while working on a biography of

Montgomery. Portions of the letters were quoted in Gillen's book, but now the main part of the correspondence, with some minor deletions, has been edited for publication by Francis Bolger and Elizabeth Epperly.

Dr. Bolger, a history professor at the University of Prince Edward Island, has previously edited *The Years Before "Anne,"* a selection of Montgomery's early letters and literary efforts. Dr. Epperly was attracted to the Island because of "Anne" and is now a professor of English Literature at the University there. Both editors show a genuine feeling for the author and present her material with intelligence and insight.

When the correspondence begins, Montgomery is already an established writer of freelance prose and verse, advising MacMillan on potential markets for his work. She is disarmingly honest in her opinion of her own abilities: "I know that I can never be a really great writer. My aspiration is limited to this—I want to be a *good workman* in my chosen profession." When *Anne of Green Gables* is published in 1908 she evinces surprise that the book is taken more seriously than a mere story for girls, and at the same time she is delighted by the favourable reviews in such respected journals as *The Spectator*. The book's success has drawbacks, however; she complains of readers who "pester" her constantly and her publisher's insistence that she hurry through a sequel to take advantage of current sales.

The market was always a consideration for Montgomery. She wrote to make a living and geared many of her stories towards the young people's magazines because they paid well and were eager for her work. But, like other writers of classic children's literature, much of her own identity was centered in the figure of the child, and in her best work she achieved an archetypal quality which readers still recognize.

That she herself is aware of a difference is evident in a letter written shortly after the publication of the first "Anne": "You speak of my having *three* styles. I daresay that is true. But the style of *Anne* is my real style. The others are only skilfully assumed garments to suit the particular story being 'built.' I wrote *Anne* in my *own* style and I think that is the secret of her success."

Sequels were to prove a continual irritation; Montgomery would have preferred not to write about her heroines once they entered adolescence. This was partially true because her insights were clearer about the younger child, but she also expresses dissatisfaction with the pressures of the public and publishers to portray teenaged girls as "sweet insipid things" who are barely aware of the existence of boys. Her own thoughts on love are discussed with candour early in her friendship with MacMillan. She speaks of the one passion of her life, a young man of little education or mental abilities, whom she did not respect, but still found extremely attractive. His early death prevented her from what she felt to be an inevitably disastrous union. At the time of this communication with MacMillan, Montgomery had been engaged to Ewan Macdonald for over a year, but not until they were about to be married in 1911 did she write her friend about the relationship.

As the editors observe, there remained a paradox in Montgomery's revelations of private life; she would discuss her innermost thoughts on love or the existence of God, yet omit or alter some of her more commonplace experiences. In her early letters to MacMillan she describes her childhood as one of total isolation, failing to mention her friendships with nearby cousins or the two boys who boarded at her grandparents' farm for several years. There seems a conscious attempt to

create a somewhat romantic image of herself as author and to preserve some degree of distance even among her close friends.

Realities were always faced by Montgomery, but she softened them whenever possible with her love of nature and her sense of humour. Literary tours provide amusing moments such as her conversation with the wife of a history teacher whose student included Anne of Green Gables in between Katherine of Aragon and Jane Seymour in a list of Henry VIII's wives. A luncheon with Emmeline Pankhurst elicits the following comment: "She had a sweet, tired gentle face—looked more like a Presbyterian elder's wife who had nothing more strenuous in her life than running the local Ladies Aid and putting up with the elder."

Montgomery's capacity for joy was most fully realized through her deep sensitivity to nature, which is frequently described in terms of fantasy and mysticism. A group of spruce trees at sunset are ". . . like dark, slender witchmaidens weaving their spells of magic in a rune of elder days" and walking in the woods, she identifies herself as ". . . the priestess of an oracle under her sacred pines." Although she finds the beauty of the Muskoka breathtaking, her visits home to her Island provide a spiritual reunion with her old haunts. Such heightened perceptions produced an interest in psychic experimentation, and Montgomery writes several interesting accounts of attempts to communicate with a dead friend, and prophetic dreams about the outcome of battles during the First World War.

As the years of their correspondence progressed, Montgomery's letters to MacMillan took the form of yearly epistles, frequently running to more than twenty pages. Since much of their material was culled from her journals, there are some repetitions of the

previously published letters to her other literary correspondent, Ephraim Weber. But there remain more than sufficient examples of new insights to make the present collection an important addition to the slowly increasing body of works about the author. Montgomery once wrote to MacMillan: "In a few generations letters will be obsolete. Everyone will *talk* to absent friends the world over by *radio*. It will be nice, but something will be lost with letters." Her prediction is turning out to be accurate, but fortunately not in time to prevent an increased acquaintance with the writer through the pages of her own correspondence.

Susannah Joyce-Jones  
London, Ontario

**In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in British Columbia.** Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess, Eds. *Camosum College: Victoria, B.C., 1980. Pp. 302.*

*In Her Own Right* is an ambitious attempt by a group of lay historians to write a women's history of British Columbia. According to the editors, their purpose was not intentionally "to advance the theoretical explanations of women's historiography in Canada," but to offer a regional perspective on various activities B.C. women have been engaged in historically. This means looking at topics such as immigration, politics, reform, prostitution, and (with reference to native women) hunting. Over half of the seventeen articles in this volume focus on institutions. Thus, B.C. women are considered within the milieu of orphanages, Women's Institutes, suffrage and moral reform organizations, University Clubs, trade unions and social welfare services.