

Chapter Six

“Mute Misery”: Speaking the unspeakable in L. M. Montgomery’s *Anne* Books

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“Anne, you have talked even on for ten minutes by the clock,” said Marilla.

“Now, just for curiosity’s sake, see if you can hold your tongue for the same length of time.”

~ *Anne of Green Gables* (93)

“I was often very hungry before I came to Green Gables—at the orphanage...and before. I’ve never cared to talk of those days.”

~ *Anne of Ingleside* (245)

When the orphaned Anne has mistakenly, but fortuitously, been left at Bright River station, the very first thing we learn about her is that she has, in the words of the stationmaster, “a tongue of her own, that’s for certain” (11). From this moment, Anne’s interaction with every new person she meets is characterized by her ceaseless chatter and her comical employment of all sorts of “big words” to express her even bigger ideas (15). Yet while Lucy Maud Montgomery’s series of *Anne* novels continually draw attention to her heroine’s prodigious gifts of verbal and written expression, there are some notable scores on which Anne remains if not precisely *silent*, then, at the very least, tongue-tied. In this chapter, I explore that which is repressed by the irrepressible Anne. Although repressed, ideas and events deemed unspeakable

by Anne and her intimates nevertheless insinuate their way into their discourse and are eventually given textual enunciation.

Traumatic events in the *Anne* novels present particular obstacles to free expression. Much is left unsaid in Montgomery's rendering of such circumstances as Anne's miserable childhood before she came to Green Gables, and her responses to the deaths which frame the series: that of her beloved father-figure Matthew in the first novel, and that of her son Walter, in the series' final installment, *Rilla of Ingleside*. Montgomery's treatment of grief and loss undergoes a profound shift between her 1915 *Anne of the Island* and her 1917 *Anne's House of Dreams*; this shift was wrought by her own direct experience of loss on both a personal and national scale. The devastating still-birth of her second son, Hugh, who was born and died in the same week that war was declared in Europe in the August of 1914, had a marked effect on the representation of mourning in her later novels. Maternal mourning and the carnage of war were thus intimately linked for Montgomery in ways that surpass what might otherwise have been felt as a more generalized grief at the senseless loss of a generation of young Canadian men.

Additionally, the quandary of how to mourn those young men who gave their lives for the great and glorious good of the Empire re-invokes Montgomery's private grief for Herman Leard—a man presented by her journals as utterly unmarriageable, but nevertheless the love of her life. Just as Anne, Rilla, and Gertrude in *Rilla of Ingleside* cannot adequately mourn their dead, because of the patriotic demands made upon them by nation and Empire, Montgomery herself was denied the right to mourn the man who was “neither husband nor son” (*Rilla*, 184). Whereas in the earlier books death is met with forbearance and a quiet acceptance of the superiority of everlasting life, the very language of *Rilla of Ingleside*, the last in the *Anne* series, draws into the world of the text a viscerally-felt grief that is simultaneously personal and

communal. In reading *Anne of Green Gables* alongside its series of sequels and Montgomery's own journals, I track the ways in which her narrative concerns and strategies developed over the course of twenty years so as to give voice not only to such unspeakable topics as child abuse and domestic violence, but also to incorporate into her novels her own increasingly nuanced—because increasingly personal—conception of the nature of grief.

From very early on in her writing career, Montgomery evinced an interest in the relationship between speech and trauma. Her journal describes her third novel, *Kilmeny of the Orchard* (1910), as “a love story with a psychological interest,” yet the young author seems entirely unaware of exactly how topical her “psychological” concerns would prove to be (*Selected Journals* 1, 362). *Kilmeny* tells the story of a young woman who is mysteriously rendered mute from birth as a result of her mother's unforgivable sin. Her ability to speak miraculously returns when she is shocked into speech by the imminent murder of her beloved. In linking speech, trauma, and inexorable, hereditary guilt, Montgomery evinces interest in a set of concerns remarkably similar to those preoccupying Sigmund Freud, who, with his *Dora* in 1905, just three years before the publication of *Anne of Green Gables*, published his own landmark narrative of an adolescent girl's search for validation by her family and her peers. While there is conclusive evidence that Montgomery was familiar with Freudian theories of family dynamics by the time she wrote *Anne of Ingleside* in 1939, there is nothing in her early journal entries to suggest that she had encountered his thought at the time of writing either *Green Gables* or *Kilmeny*.ⁱ

Nevertheless, Montgomery not only recognized the intimate relation between shame, guilt, pain, and non-speech, but she also advocated her own version of a “talking cure.” Due to the long stretches the author spent without ready access to her most kindred of spirits—dearly

beloved relatives such as her father, or friends such as Frederica (Frede) Campbell—her desire for a talking cure was very early on adapted into what we might call a “writing cure.” This writing cure was not simply the sense of relief and release that she undoubtedly felt after unburdening her secrets into her journal; rather, writing became the occasion for “self-analysis,” for “putting her real thoughts and feelings into words” (*Selected Journals* 2, 1). Writing was very much a therapeutic process for Montgomery, both in the way that her journal played the part of a confidant and in the more “psychoanalytic” sense that setting her thoughts and experiences down in writing allowed for advances in self-knowledge.

Yet before such a writing cure could be put into effect, certain barriers to free expression had to be negotiated. In both her public and private writing, Montgomery faced obstructions caused by the burdens of grief and pain, the demands of patriotic discourse, or even the fear of unseemliness. In addition to these barriers, she was well aware that writing, like speaking, can be a cathartic process, yet can also cause the writer or speaker to relive the events described to the point of reproducing not only mental anguish, but also bodily sensation. In telling the story of her shameful entanglement with Herman Leard, for example, she ploughs on through her account, though each successive detail recorded in her journal is “still more racking” to her harrowed nerves than the one that came before (*Selected Journals* 1, 208).ⁱⁱ A less melodramatic example is her record of the death of her son, Hugh. Still-born as a result of a knot in his umbilical cord, Hugh’s death was an experience of unprecedented agony, which presented Montgomery with a new set of obstacles to both speech and writing. As a mother, the trauma of putting her grief into words proved insurmountable, as evinced by her refusal to record her first visit to her son’s grave (*Selected Journals* 2, 155). More than any other experience recorded in her early journals, the

untimely death of her child called into question the goodness of God; but as a minister's wife, her very ability to mourn was constrained by the social pressures incumbent upon her.

Montgomery shared the experience of losing a child with another bestselling novelist and clergyman's wife: Harriet Beecher Stowe. In commenting on Stowe's loss and its resonance in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Marianne Noble has situated the separation of mother and child, more usually through the death of the mother, as the "emotional core" of almost all of the significant sentimental fictions of the nineteenth century (Noble 65-66). Sentimentalism, she argues (along with most theorists of the topic), is characterized by the desire for unity, the reparation of sundered domestic relationships. Such texts work upon their readers, she suggests, by achieving a state of union through the depiction of suffering; that is, they offer us a "visceral and intuitive understanding of the other's fear and anguish" (Noble 65).ⁱⁱⁱ But if readers would agree that *Anne of Green Gables* has the most sentimental of plots—a mistreated orphan girl is adopted by a middle-aged spinster and her brother, all three of whom come to experience the redemptive power of familial love and the sacrifices made in the name of that love—then why are paradigmatic scenes of loss and suffering so rapidly passed over by Montgomery's narration?

This chapter is structured by the significant occlusion of suffering in the *Anne* books—in particular, the suffering associated with the death of those close to Anne. I begin with Matthew's death in *Anne of Green Gables*, then consider the death of little Joy in *Anne's House of Dreams*, and finally discuss *Rilla of Ingleside*, in which sorrow, rage, and pain erupt through the tissue of patriotic stoicism with which all Montgomery's female characters are imbued. By moving through these losses, I trace the development of the author's own narrative strategies for dealing with events that are both unspeakable and ineffable: unspeakable because socially unacceptable and ineffable because imbued with emotion too intense for linguistic representation. Insofar as

grief and mourning are represented as experiences beyond individual characters' capacities for expression, Montgomery nevertheless supplies her readers with scenes of reading and writing, within the novels themselves, which instruct them how to recognize true feeling. That is, in pillorying the "silly sentiment" and sensationalism that characterized certain well-known exemplars of sentimental fiction,^{iv} Montgomery's earlier novels teach readers that authentic suffering is located not in voluble displays of emotion, but in between the lines of otherwise exemplarily decorous discourse. Through the strategic use of silence, understatement, humor, and displacement, Montgomery embeds in these novels traumatic stories of bodies and minds in pain.

Yet, given that a parallel purpose of sentimental literature is to instruct its readers in the uncomplaining forbearance of earthly trials, it is easy to read the silences of Montgomery's characters as capitulations to the demands of sentimental stoicism. However, her novels also demonstrate that the most deeply-felt suffering is not encapsulated by the symbolic register of language alone, but is also written on, and betrayed by, the body. At key moments throughout the series, it is not what characters say, so much as the way in which they say it, that telegraphs their feelings of grief, shame, or rage to readers. Montgomery thus figures the manifestation of these feelings as eruptions from the register of language that Julia Kristeva has termed the semiotic *chora*. In her theory of communication and desire, Kristeva uses the term "semiotic" to describe a realm of meaning that is non-verbal, comprising gesture, intonation, and sounds that are non-sensical, such as cries or moans. These seemingly involuntary eruptions underscore the disciplinary force of the symbolic register (as in the case of hand gestures, for example), which is the register of words: their commonly understood meanings and their arrangement into syntactic, logical order. However, these involuntary eruptions also, in many ways, *undermine* the

disciplinary structure of the symbolic because tone and bodily contortion can affect the meaning of what is said. I conclude that Montgomery's sympathetic demonstration of "semiotic" mourning, most vividly glimpsed in *Rilla of Ingleside*, represents a rebellion against prevailing contemporary models of sentimental stoicism. In directing us to read her novels in ways which draw attention to these moments of rebellion, Montgomery reveals to us a grief that is neither resolved nor accepted.

"Reading between the lines"

Those familiar with the unfortunate fates of Ladies Cordelia Montmorency and Geraldine Seymore will be well aware that sudden and tragic deaths figure largely in young Anne's literary productions. Indeed, all the stories produced by the members of the story club—Anne, Diana Barry, Jane Andrews, and Ruby Gillis—"are very pathetic and almost everybody died" (211). If readers are not tipped off already by Anne's hyperbolic descriptions of Cordelia's "dusky flashing" and Geraldine's "velvety purple eyes," they know to take their cue from the hilarity these stories provoke in the Reverend and Mrs Allan, and Miss Josephine Barry (208). While these three are clearly not Anne's ideal readers, for "they laughed in all the wrong places and [she] like[d] it better when people cry," they are clearly Montgomery's (211). The Allans, in particular, are characters whom Montgomery has set up to be the most sympathetic to both her heroine and to the author's reading public. Anne's intense desire for Mrs Allan's approval leads younger and adult readers alike to align themselves with the minister's wife in her warmly amused, but always infinitely understanding, responses to Anne's undertakings. Anne's beloved teacher, Miss Stacy, is also such a character. The novel's strongest statement against "silly sentiment" comes in the form of the teacher's sharp criticism of any writing that does not stem

from Anne's everyday experiences in Avonlea (283, 255). The most effective prose, she teaches, is the simplest and the shortest.

As though the author has followed Miss Stacy's instructions, death, when it eventually comes to Green Gables, is in fact given scarcely more textual space than the heart-rending tale of "The Jealous Rival; or, In Death not Divided." While the occasional Anne-like descriptor escapes into the narrative—Matthew has been "crowned" by "the white majesty of death" (294)—the sparse record of Matthew's death gestures to an experience up to this point completely alien to Anne: the inability to put her thoughts and feelings into words. The words and the tears that have come so easily to Anne, in times of both joy and sorrow throughout the novel, fail her at this moment, leaving only the "horrible dull ache of misery" (295).^v This shift in narrative register serves an obvious structural purpose in setting aside the episode of Matthew's death, and its attendant very real trauma, from the melodramatic episodes that have elicited such tempestuous and deeply-felt responses from Anne in the past—her abject mourning for the loss of her hair comes to mind here! Yet in presenting Anne's response to Matthew's death as an instantiation of the inadequacy of language itself, Montgomery also introduces readers to what will become her ongoing concern with the ineffability of grief, a concern that will extend into questions of how to articulate trauma on a broader scale.

The most important distinction to draw here is the difference between those experiences that are simply too painful to articulate and those that are constrained by social taboos. Both of these dilemmas are presented in a variety of ways throughout the *Anne* series and both will ultimately find modes of expression, even if the means by which they do so will seem far removed from the original pain. With respect to the question of what *may* be talked about in polite society, we can clearly see the development of Montgomery's narrative strategy if we set

in relief Anne's story before she came to Green Gables and the biography of Mary Vance, as it is told in *Rainbow Valley*. Immediately obvious to readers of both novels is the almost total absence of Anne's backstory in *Anne of Green Gables*. We know that she is the daughter of respectable people, and that over the course of her eleven years she has been shunted from one disreputable family to the next, before ending up in the ironically-named Hopeton asylum. The one detail Anne shares of this experience is her exasperation with the three sets of twins to whose care she has had to dedicate a large portion of her short life.

The comic relief offered by the vision of three sets of twins masks the drudgery to which Anne has been subjected, while her passing acknowledgement of Mrs Thomas' "drunken husband," coupled with the break-neck pace of her narrative, allows readers to gloss over the potential for violence encoded in that short phrase (39-40). Given that we know that Anne does not enjoy "talking about her experiences in a world that had not wanted her," her bowdlerizing of her past may certainly be understood, in part, as a defense mechanism. In reciting her story as though it is a lesson she has learned by heart, Anne keeps at bay any of the disturbing memories that may manifest themselves somatically as she fills Marilla in on her personal history. Indeed, without delving too deeply into an analysis of Anne's immense capacity for imaginative dissociation, and what this might tell us about the violence she has suffered in her past, it is sufficient to note here that when Marilla presses her for more information, Anne responds with physical discomfort. Tellingly, her reaction is an inarticulate expression of shame and embarrassment: "'O-o-o-h,' faltered Anne. Her sensitive little face suddenly flushed scarlet and embarrassment sat on her brow" (41).^{vi} Up to this point, the rapidity of her delivery and her matter-of-fact tone have resisted our pity, and, it seems, Marilla's. It is not until Marilla takes note of the language of Anne's body that her sympathy for this "sensitive, 'highstrung' child" is

stirred (46). It is not an elaborately worded entreaty, but enough is telegraphed by Anne's posture of rigid anxiety and her "look of mute misery" that Marilla is able "to read between the lines and divine the truth" of Anne's experience (41, 46).

Anne's inability to speak in the scenes leading up to her lucky escape from Mrs Blewett—a woman memorably described as "exactly like a gimlet"—throws into sharp relief the two sources of silence in the *Anne* series (47). Anne does not reveal the details of her unhappy childhood both because she cannot and because she must not. The fact that words themselves are often incommensurable with traumatic experiences plays a part in her silence, as in the case of Matthew's death, but just as significantly, there are certain social niceties that must be observed, even by a narrator gifted with the power of free indirect discourse. The veil drawn over Anne's past by the novel's very narrative structure suggests the author's unwillingness to present her heroine to her readers as damaged in any way. Anne does finally share her entire story with the sympathetic Mrs Allan, who is, more than coincidentally, the minister's wife and whose ears are therefore more suitable receptacles for confessions than Diana's, or even the maiden Marilla's. But readers are not privy to this particular conversation. Instead, it is not until "The Advent of Mary Vance" in 1919's *Rainbow Valley* that the details of what it must have been like for Anne to be "an unloved little drudge" (*Rainbow* 81) finally come to light.

As Perry Nodelman has noted elsewhere in this volume, Montgomery's *Anne* stories are characterized by her tendency to revisit and transform ideas and images from her earlier works. Anne admits to seeing something of herself in imaginative, outspoken Mary Vance, and while this resemblance is immediately quashed by Miss Cornelia's refusal to consider the obviously déclassé Mary as in any way similar to her beloved Anne (to whom Miss Cornelia feels herself to be both socially and spiritually kindred), Anne's empathy for Mary's position allows us to

read their stories as parallel. A further link is forged between the two by Faith Meredith's identification of the Hopeton asylum as "the same place Mrs Blythe came from" (33). In hearing Anne's name invoked so shortly after Mary's tales of "lickings," "larrupings," neglect, and near starvation, readers who may not have made the connection between the two "homeless little orphans" are reminded of the circumstances of Anne's life before she came to Green Gables (62). Mary's account of her life is vouchsafed by the bruises and starvation so plainly displayed on and by her "scrawny arms and thin hands" (31). Such emphasis on her malnourished frame, and "the old plaid dress, much too tight and short for her," causes us to wonder what kinds of scars and what evidence of abuse and neglect that other "very short, very tight, very ugly dress of yellow-ish grey wincey" may have hidden all those years ago (*Rainbow* 30, *Green Gables* 11).^{vii}

But in openly confessing and displaying the gruesome details of her personal history—those same kinds of details that Anne's natural delicacy excised from her account—Mary Vance shows us that she does not "come from the same place" as "Mrs Dr" Blythe, née Anne Shirley. Anne is somehow essentially different from Mary because of her inherited refinement of sensibility. Unlike the discourse of the "ladylike" Anne, which entails, as Marilla approvingly notes, "nothing rude or slangy" and thus reveals her connections to "nice folks" (*Green Gables* 41), Mary Vance's speech is peppered with profanities and slang terms. Far from being "nice folks," her parents were violent, alcoholic suicides, driven to their deaths by "booze" (*Rainbow* 33). Mary's unabashed account of the violence she suffered at their hands and the hands of the unpleasantly named Mrs. Wiley, from whom she has escaped, illustrates that social class plays a key role in what may and may not be spoken by particular characters in Montgomery's novels.

The introduction of Mary Vance into the last two books of the series finally makes public the plight of abused, overworked, and neglected children but does so in a way that

distances Mary from Anne even as similarities are identified between them. Mary's traumatic history can be laid relatively bare without fear that young readers will identify with her to the extent that they are somehow traumatized in turn. By manipulating the strategies of sentimental narrative in ways that had earlier been employed by survivors of slavery, such as Harriet Jacobs, Montgomery manages to expose the abuses of child domestic labor without compromising the innocence of her readers. Both these writers make use of the structure of the sentimental novel in order to garner the understanding of her readers; the familiar domestic space of such narratives "seduces" them into sympathy with characters who might otherwise have scandalized their sensibilities.^{viii} Yet like Jacobs' text, both *Rainbow Valley* and *Anne of Green Gables* introduce the trope of domestic spaces that are not always safe. All three of these narratives employ the tropes of sentimental discourse, only to overturn them subtly in ways that expose what Toni Morrison has famously referred to as those "unspeakable things, unspoken"—the physical (and even more unspeakably, sexual) violence meted out upon slaves, and in Mary Vance's and Anne's cases, on children "employed" as domestic servants.^{ix} Jacobs was well aware of the fine line between "chaste civility" and the authentic recitation of her experiences. She therefore insisted on the publication of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in manuscript form before she herself testified publically to her experience. Using the mediating structure built in to novels in general, and domestic fiction in particular, Jacobs was able to maintain the alliance with her readers which would have been destabilized by her embodied, racialized presence. A sentimentalized, textual body stands in for the actual, abused body with the result that sympathy is converted into support for abolition and radical political action. In a similar, yet not necessarily identical move, Mary Vance's body stands in for Anne's, displacing the realities of

child-abuse onto the working class child. Montgomery's deeply personal concern with the mistreatment of children thus manifests itself without sabotaging the purity of her heroine.

On hearing of the phenomenal success of *Anne of Green Gables* in 1908 Montgomery wrote in her journal that she was glad she had kept "the shadows of [her] life out of [her] work" (SJI, 339). However, Mary's appearance in *Rainbow Valley* (both the novel and the actual idyll for which the text is named) suggests that a significant development in Montgomery's thinking and writing about childhood took place between 1908 and 1919—one which encourages us to look again at the supposedly shadow-free narrative of *Green Gables*. Unlike the narrative of the first *Anne* book in which abuse, violence, and neglect are obscured, such things are now explicitly acknowledged as presences in the "rainbow valley" of childhood, just as the brutal truth that young boys grow up to be soldiers underlies the novel's poignant concluding vignette of the Blythe and Meredith children meeting together in the valley for the last time:

The lads who were to fight, and perhaps fall, on the fields of France and Flanders, Gallipoli and Palestine, were still roguish schoolboys with a fair life in prospect before them: the girls whose hearts were to be wrung were yet fair little maidens a-star with hopes and dreams. (*Rainbow* 224)

"What a terrible thing it is to be a mother"

Montgomery's own difficult marriage, the still-birth of her second son, Hugh, and the outbreak of the First World War undoubtedly challenged her resolve to be only a "messenger of optimism and sunshine" (*Selected Journals* 1, 339). *Anne's House of Dreams*, the first book of the four that describe Anne's life as a wife and mother, is a veritable catalogue of male violence, feminine manipulations, and the suffering of innocents (Robinson 28). Significantly, the steady

litany of complaints about abusive husbands is placed in the mouth of the comical, “man-hating” Miss Cornelia Bryant. We, as readers, are presumably supposed to assume that her accounts are exaggerated, or somehow unfounded—and to simply dismiss them as a harmless form of gossip. Yet as Jenny Rubio has shown, it is precisely through gossip that women are able to express support for one another and articulate certain feelings that the demands of “decorum” might otherwise force them to internalize. Projecting one’s own experiences of rage or jealousy onto absent others provides an outlet for socially unacceptable feelings of “anger and frustration” (Rubio 173).

Furthermore, in making Miss Cornelia a source of amusement, Montgomery once again manages to represent an unpalatable social reality while providing her readers with distance from the unfortunate women and children whose male protectors regularly starve, strike, and browbeat them. Several of Miss Cornelia’s tales, in fact, have a basis in reality. The unfortunate Henry Hammond, who sustains brain damage after his father “threw a stump at him when he was small” (*House* 50) has a historical counterpart in Dan Fraser, the brother of Simon Fraser with whom Montgomery boarded while teaching school in Belmont (*Selected Journals* 1, 165). Moreover, in several key instances, Miss Cornelia’s stories of domestic abuse are confirmed or subtly endorsed by other, more “reliable” characters. Even Gilbert, the impartial man of science, and the magnanimous Captain Jim are forced to acknowledge that Billy Booth has a dangerously jealous streak (*House* 112), and that Lewis Taylor starves his family and works his wife into the ground (94).

The “demonic marriage” of Leslie Moore forms the gruesome centerpiece of this series of tableaux of domestic discord.^x Captain Jim and Miss Cornelia come to one of their rare moments of agreement in acknowledging the series of “tragedies” that have befallen Leslie

throughout her life, tragedies that culminate in her forced marriage to the boorish, drunken despoiler of women, Dick Moore. However, as Irene Gammel has noted, the details of this union are tellingly absent from Montgomery's novel ("My Secret Garden" 55). Anne enjoins Leslie not to speak of the agonies she endured upon her brother's death, as well as upon her discovery that her husband not only "drank," but was also responsible for the unfortunate fate of "the girl down at the fishing cove" (*House* 127). The ordinarily outspoken Miss Cornelia also stops short of recounting what is presumably a tale of seduction and abandonment, simply labeling the story a "nasty" one (73). But whereas Gammel directs readers to Montgomery's account of her own marital difficulties in her journals, in order to fill in the gaps left in the fictional narrative, my intention here is to emphasize the narrative strategies Montgomery employed *in* the novels to represent these seemingly unrepresentable violences of thought and deed. Through a form of negation—the explicit refusal to speak, or the denial of speech—such events and feelings obtain a glaring textual presence by means of their very absence.

Injunctions against speaking immediately point towards what is left unsaid and what must not be heard. Even wordless injunctions, like the cotton wool Susan Baker stuffs in her ears to drown out the sounds of Anne's long and difficult labor, direct our attention to yet another silence in Montgomery's novels—the unmentionability, except in coy euphemisms, of pregnancy and childbirth (*House* 114). Given the very real possibilities of infant and maternal mortality, in addition to Montgomery's actual experience of the death of her son through complications during birth, it is unsurprising that pregnancy and childbirth should be referred to only obliquely. The refusal to name Anne's condition during either of her pregnancies in *House of Dreams*, and again in *Anne of Ingleside*, may be understood as a form of superstition, an unwillingness to "jinx" the safe passage of both mother and baby through pregnancy and labor. Yet in

Montgomery's writing motherhood brings with it a whole host of other necessary silences—fears that must remain unspoken, and resentments and rages that run contrary to the demands made on mothers by both church and state. Just as in her later novel, Anne and her daughter, Rilla will force themselves to wave their boys off to war with smiles that reflect their patriotic support for the war effort (*Rilla*, 138), Anne is rebuked for voicing her contention that her baby's death was the work of the devil which God failed to avert.

Anne's labor pains may have been smothered by Susan's judicious use of cotton wool, but her raw anguish on learning of the death of her baby, little Joy, is harder to silence. Refusing to countenance the idea that little Joy's death is evidence of God's benign will, Anne declares that it may just as easily be the result of "a thwarting of his purpose by the Power of Evil" (*House* 118). She is immediately hushed by a scandalized Marilla, but not before Anne's outburst and Marilla's reaction have done their work. This brief scene, made all the more poignant by the transmigration of Montgomery's own pain, illustrates the limits imposed upon maternal mourning by the Christian creed voiced here by Miss Cornelia: "the Lord [giveth] and the Lord [taketh] away" (*House* 116) In being cut off by well meaning and morally upstanding characters like Marilla and Miss Cornelia, Anne's rebellious exclamations can be permitted to remain in the text. A blasphemy that Montgomery, as a minister's wife, could never have uttered openly is given safe expression by her fictional character. Anne is gently taken to task for it, but our readerly sympathies for her are so engaged by this point that her words remain with us despite Marilla's attempt at silencing.

Despite the tragic loss of little Joy, the greatest test of Anne's maternal endurance will ultimately come with the outbreak of war in *Rilla of Ingleside*. As Montgomery confided on more than one occasion in her journal, mother-love, "exquisite as it is, is full of anguish too"

(*Selected Journals 2*, 101). She tormented herself with the prospect that she might die in childbirth, leaving her child to experience the suffering and loss of a motherless existence (*Selected Journals 2*, 97), while the very thought of her own child being “neglected or ill-used” elicited from her cries of abject horror (*Selected Journals 2*, 102). To be a mother is to sacrifice forever the unequivocal pleasures of imagination. Once a well-spring of comfort, escape, and autonomy, the imagination becomes the source of unspeakable agonies. For mothers, imagination is no longer a refuge from the world’s reality, but rather an extension of it.

If to be a mother is already to imagine all the most terrifying things that may befall a child, then how much more agonizing must it be to be the mother of soldiers? Throughout the preceding *Anne* books, the imagination has consistently been invoked as a means of escape. As an abused and neglected domestic drudge, Anne maintained an original and autonomous subjectivity through the power of her imagination. Throughout the series, therefore, there is no situation which cannot be improved upon by her imagination, or from which she cannot use her imagination to escape. But the outbreak of war and the initial enlistment of her eldest son, Jem, finally defeats the diversionary power of her legendary imagination. After Jem leaves for the Front, she declares:

“I hate going to bed now. All my life I’ve liked going to bed, to have a gay, mad, splendid half hour of imagining things before sleeping. Now I imagine them still. But much different things.” (*Rilla* 99)

Anne’s voice trails off, leaving readers to contemplate the different ways in which a mother might imagine the unnatural horror that the violent and premature death of a son signifies.

In industrialized warfare lies a rather grim irony. Families of soldiers fighting in the First World War had more access to the particulars of the battlefield than civilians had had during any

prior conflict, yet the most crucial knowledge—the whereabouts and safety of one’s loved ones—remained unavailable.^{xi} In *Rilla of Ingleside*, the cruel promise of this information overload is dramatized by the contrast between Montgomery’s comic rendering of Susan Baker’s exponential learning curve and the agony of “not knowing” in the chapters of Jem’s disappearance:

The gallant Anzacs withdrew from Gallipoli and Susan approved the step, with reservations. The siege of Kut-El-Amara began and Susan pored over maps of Mesopotamia and abused the Turks. . . . Sir John French was superseded by Sir Douglas Haig and Susan dubiously opined that it was poor policy to swap horses crossing a stream. . . . “There was a time,” she said sorrowfully, “when I did not care what happened outside of P.E. Island, and now a king cannot have a toothache. . . but it worries me. It may be broadening to the mind as the doctor said, but it is very painful to the feelings.” (*Rilla* 160)

Yet all this access to reports, newsreels, radio broadcasts, and postcards cannot yield the information that the Blythe family desires when Jem is reported “wounded and missing.” Rilla agonizes:

“Must we go for weeks and months—not knowing whether Jem is alive or dead?” . . . I think this is even worse than the news of his death would have been. . . . Perhaps we will never know. I—I *cannot* bear it—I *cannot*. Walter and now Jem. This will kill mother—look at her face . . . and you will see that.” (*Rilla* 264)

In such lacunae within the official war record a dangerous, uncontrollable form of imagination resides. In the absence of information, images leap unbidden to the mind’s eye, such as when Rilla stands to recite at a Red Cross fundraiser in the Glen. She sees before her not a sea of her

friends' and neighbors' faces, but only the face of her brother Walter who has just enlisted. Yet it is not his presence in the audience that she “sees” but rather, she envisions all the possible ways in which he might meet his death:

. . . one face only—that of the handsome, dark-haired lad . . . she saw it in the trenches, saw it lying cold and dead under the stars—saw it pining in prison—saw the light of his eyes blotted out—saw a hundred horrible things as she stood there on the beflagged platform of the Glen hall with her own face whiter than the milky crab blossoms in her hair (*Rilla* 128).

In *Rilla of Ingleside*, imagination is transformed from a delightful escapist tool into a source of prophetic truth. Rilla seems to have been blessed (or cursed) here with a little of what we might call the “clairvoyant” or “mystic” imaginations of Walter Blythe and Gertrude Oliver. At the lighthouse dance, the night before the outbreak of war is declared to the youth of Glen St Mary, Miss Oliver dreams that a tidal wave of blood washes over the Glen, obliterating life as the Prince Edward Islanders know it. Gertrude recounts a variation of a dream that Montgomery herself recorded in her journal (*Selected Journals* 2, 177). Gertrude explains,

The Glen was being swallowed up. I thought, “Surely the waves will not come near Ingleside”—but they came nearer and nearer . . . and everything was gone—there was nothing but a waste of stormy water where the Glen had been. I tried to draw back—and I saw that the edge of my dress was wet, *with blood*. (*Rilla* 20)

Similarly, after war has been declared Walter has a vision:

“Before this war is over,” he said—or something said through his lips—“every man and woman in Canada will feel it—you Mary, will feel it to your heart’s core. You will weep

tears of blood over it. The piper has come—and he will pipe until every corner of the world has heard his awful, irresistible music.” (36)

Ostensibly, this blood is the blood of the men (including fifty thousand Canadians) who gave their lives during the First World War. The blood that flows is that of slaughtered sacrificial victims—an explicit theme in *Rilla*. Walter departs for the war, “not radiantly, as to a high adventure, like Jem . . . but in a *white flame of sacrifice*”; and in the letter home, which he knows to be his last, he writes that he fights, and will die, for the fate of all mankind (*Rilla* 226; my emphasis). But even more than signifiers of sacrifice, the tears and torrents of blood that ebb and flow throughout *Rilla* function as a semiotics of a specifically feminine mourning, a particular grief that has no verbal expression in the novel, but nevertheless betrays itself on the level of Montgomery’s very language.

Although, as Donna Coates has argued, the mourning of wives, mothers, and sisters was “socially sanctioned” (76), characters evince very little tolerance for public outpourings of grief in *Rilla of Ingleside*. Both Rilla and Anne are frequently exhorted to “keep a stiff upper lip.” The rousing lines “When our women fail in courage, / Shall our men be fearless still?” are quoted more than once in the novel (*Rilla* 43, 127). Anne sees Jem off with a wave and a smile and even Shirley is given a stoic blessing to go to the Front, despite Walter’s recent death. However, it is my contention that the voice of mourning erupts through the veneer of stalwart patriotism encasing Montgomery’s narrative. Her patriotic edifice is assailed first in the waves of blood, which are so like the blood and water that attend both birth and death, and secondly in the metaphor of rending that recurs throughout the text, most notably in reference to the utterances of Gertrude Oliver. Behind the patriotic and empowering depiction of Anne and Rilla at their war work, there lurks an abiding, and deeply disturbing, current of grief that operates directly at odds

with the representation of women as guardians of the Home Front. The public sphere represented by “the Call greater and more insistent than the call of [familial or erotic] love” is everywhere assailed by feminine affects that will not stay private (*Rilla* 131). Rilla “passionately” responds to her mother’s description of this call: “our boys give only *themselves*. *We* give them” (131). That is, there are bonds of familial love and loyalty that men may be prepared to break, but such commitments will be upheld by women in defiance of any priority the state claims to have over the family.^{xii}

Rilla’s most significant contribution to the war effort is her adoption of the war baby, “James Kitchener Anderson,” who awakens her nascent maternal urges and provides the occasion for Rilla’s transition from girlhood to womanhood, when she will become a fitting wife for the dashing Kenneth Ford. On his last night of leave, Ken visits Ingleside in order to reveal his feelings for Rilla. In a scene that is both hilarious and cringe-inducing, “Little Kitchener” begins to cry at the top of his voice and Rilla is forced to spend her last evening with Kenneth, her war baby, and Susan as chaperone. In a tableau that speaks directly to the burden of suffering placed on the women who gave their men to defend the Empire, we see Rilla pictured as the Madonna cradling the infant Christ:

Jims . . . cuddled down against her just where a gleam of light from the lamp in the living-room struck across his hair and turned it into a halo of gold against her breast.

Kenneth sat very still and silent, looking at Rilla . . . he thought she looked exactly like the Madonna that hung over his mother’s desk at home (*Rilla*146).

This image of the Madonna and child is made all the more poignant in this context. The representation of maternal love always already contains within it the pietà of Mary cradling the dead body of her son cut down from the cross.

In her treatment of the pietà figure in “Stabat Mater,” Julia Kristeva argues that the milk and tears of Marian iconography are part of “a semiotics that linguistic expression does not account for” (174). The milk that nurtures the body of the child, the tears that prefigure its death, and, I would add, the blood that flows in the event of both birth and death are powerful metaphors of “non-speech.” That is, they are symbolic of what Montgomery herself saw as the ineffable “agony and tragedy of motherhood” (*Selected Journals* 2, 162). Whereas Kristeva quotes Simeon’s words to Mary from the Gospel of Luke (“and a sword will pierce your own soul too”), Montgomery puts similar words of prophecy in the mouth of Walter Blythe. Walter’s words to Mary Vance—“you Mary, will feel it to your heart’s core and you will weep tears of blood over it”—echo the Biblical prophecy, and, even more significantly, also foreshadow the piercing, stabbing, and rending of flesh that accompany the rare expressions of grief by women in the novel.

The first such moment occurs when Jem announces his intention to enlist alongside his childhood friend, Jerry Meredith, who is also the sweetheart of Nan, Anne’s oldest daughter and her namesake: “Jem turned to the phone again. ‘I must ring the manse. Jerry will want to go too.’ At this Nan cried out ‘Oh!’ as if a knife had been thrust into her, and rushed from the room” (45). Again and again the women in the novel express their grief through “cries,” “exclamations,” and “moans.” Their grief is involuntary and inarticulate. It wells up from the Kristevan semiotic—that modality of significance erupting into the symbolic and bearing a surplus relationship to it. For Kristeva, the semiotic is associated with the maternal body and the pre-linguistic domain of rhythm, intonation, and gesture, while the symbolic is the modality of language and meaning—the public sphere of the *Non/Nom du Père*, the name and the law of the father (Kristeva, *Revolution* 26, 29). The cries and exclamations of Nan, Rilla, and Gertrude Oliver articulate a

sorrow that cannot be bound by the social injunction against the public display of mourning. They express a very real, almost physical, agony that erupts into their otherwise carefully-scripted performances of patriotism.

It is Miss Oliver, the type of clever and charming—though occasionally mocking and cynical—schoolteacher so familiar to readers of Montgomery’s novels and journals, who is most prone to these eruptions of grief. To her the whole world is a “shriek of anguish” (114). On hearing of her fiancé’s supposed death (he is subsequently found to be only wounded) she first laughs “such a dreadful little laugh just as one might laugh in the face of death.” Later that night, Rilla hears emanating from the other woman’s room “a dreadful, sudden little cry as if she had been stabbed” (185). The viscerality of Gertrude’s articulations of grief is significant because in the eyes of many of the other characters in the novel, there is something indecorous and even politically suspect about her eruptions. “It isn’t ladylike to talk like that” is Cousin Sophia’s reaction to Miss Oliver’s diatribe against those who will not recognize her right to mourn:

“It’s true I haven’t lost a husband, I have only lost the man who would have been my husband. I have lost no son—only the sons and daughters who might have been born to me—who will never be born to me now.” (184)

It is not only unpatriotic, but also unladylike to evince any kind of strong reaction to the “*dulce et decorous*” death of men in the service of their country. Furthermore, since it is neither her husband nor her son who is enlisted to fight, she cannot vote in the elections of 1917. Only those women with an immediate relative at the Front could participate. Rilla, too, is denied a vote, despite the loss of one brother, and the active service of two more because she is not yet of age (246). The possibility of public action, either political (the recognition of a right to vote) or social (the community’s recognition of a right to mourn) is denied to both these young women. As as

result, private onslaughts of tears, dreams of waves of blood erupting from the unconscious, and immediately censured (and censored) outbursts are the only ways in which grief, rage, and frustration can be enacted.

Conclusion: “In Death Not Divided”

We might hear in such outbursts the haunting echoes of Antigone’s famously-denied claim. Like Sophocles’ heroine, who is denied both the right to mourn her brother publicly and to bury his body, those in Montgomery’s novel whose claims are unrecognized by state or society cannot perform the tasks required adequately to mourn the dead and commit their memory. While Rilla is the character placed most immediately in Antigone’s position—she has, after all, lost her brother—both Gertrude Oliver and Una Meredith inhabit this role in perhaps even more significant ways; their losses are utterly denied and devalued. Una’s case is particularly heartbreaking in the way that her love goes unacknowledged by even the beloved himself (*Rilla* 135). The hardest grief to bear, this novel seems to argue, is grief that dares not speak its name because it is socially illegitimate. Maternal mourning may be ineffable in its fundamental viscosity, but the grief for those men who are neither sons nor husbands is unspeakable because the structures of respectability require it to be so. But by once again staging a scene of writing that directs our reading practice, Montgomery finds a way to speak such grief. “I rage and cry,” Rilla tells us, “but I do it all in private and blow off steam in this diary” (76).

In what is by now a familiar strategy, Montgomery makes the private public by giving open expression to socially unacceptable subjects and feelings through the incorporation of a private narrative (the journal) into the publicly circulating narrative of her novel. Yet as latter-day readers of *Rilla of Ingleside*, we are able to give her technique one further turn of the

interpretive screw that her contemporary readers could not. We can read into this reference the acknowledgement that Montgomery's own journals were sites of explosive anger and passionate sorrow. Given that the most autobiographical character in *Rilla of Ingleside*, Gertrude Oliver, is the character who calls repeatedly for recognition of the grief belonging to those who have no legal or socially-sanctioned claim to such sorrow, it is not unreasonable to turn to Montgomery's diaries for illumination. It is in these pages that we learn of Montgomery's secret but enduring love for Herman Leard—a man to whom she could not bear to unite herself in life, but whose premature demise ensured that he should be “mine, *all* mine in death” (*Selected Journals* 1, 240). As Gammel has noted, the possessiveness of this thought intimates Montgomery's determination to inter Leard in “the mausoleum of her memory, snatching him from the clutches of [his widow] Ettie Schurman,” who frequently and publicly mourned at his graveside (Gammel, “I loved” 148). The “death” and resurrection of Gertrude's fiancé, along with the authorial directive to seek expressions of pain and grief in the pages of a journal, suggests that the grief she undoubtedly felt for the generation of young men sacrificed in the First World War coalesced around a very particular figure who was neither son nor husband, and who died fifteen years before war was even declared. Thus, in the last of the *Anne* novels (in terms of their action, if not their production), we see Montgomery's complex interplay of repression and revelation in its most virtuosic of instantiations. Not only does she make palpable the mourning of Canadian women and the challenge such sorrow mounted against a public sphere that saw the death of young men as the right and proper response to the irresistible “Call” of patriotic duty, but she also harnesses the power of this communal grief to simultaneously mask and disclose her own secret suffering. Montgomery's contemporaries would not know to read Gertrude Oliver's grief

as her own for Herman Leard, but we, the recipients of both her fiction and journals, can unravel her textual clues to see them “in death not divided.”

But ultimately, the significance of Montgomery’s extraordinary gift for incorporating into her narratives this heady mix of coyness and disclosure lies in the possibilities for reading that her texts invite. The truly unspoken and unheard of idea behind the *Anne* books, at the time of their writing and publication, was that these tales written for children, by a woman living at one of the most remote outposts of Empire, might one day be a valid object of literary study. The complexity of Montgomery’s deployment of speech and silence, public and private discourses, bodily affects and voluble chatter, and the careful reading that this technique demands, is precisely what enables volumes such as this one to come into being. More importantly, it ensures that pleasures, sorrows, and conversations inspired by *Anne of Green Gables* will continue well into its second century.

ⁱ See, for example, Anne’s dismissal of the writings of Dr. V. Z. Tomachowsky, who admonishes, “‘*You must never kiss your little son lest you set up a Jocasta complex.*’ She had laughed over it at the time and been a little angry as well. Now she only felt pity for the writer of it. Poor, poor man! For of course V. Z. Tomachowsky was a man. No woman would ever write anything so silly and wicked” (*Ingleside*, 114). Montgomery’s inversion of the Oedipus complex here suggests knowledge of Freud’s ubiquitous theory, while Anne’s skepticism leaves us in little doubt of what Montgomery’s thoughts were on the subject.

ⁱⁱ See also her account of the death of her first pet, Pussywillow, the rendering of which entails the “sickening” re-experiencing of “that unforgettable and unforgotten pain” (*Selected Journals* 1, 379).

ⁱⁱⁱ Noble references Elizabeth Barnes, David Denby, and Nina Baym as theorists who emphasize the centrality of unity and community to both Anglo-American and Continental sentimental literatures.

^{iv} It is my speculation that *L. M.* Montgomery felt a certain ambivalent kinship with *Ellen* Montgomery, the orphaned heroine of Susan Warner’s phenomenally successful, and paradigmatically sentimental, 1850 novel, *The*

Wide Wide World. Certain scenes in Montgomery's semi-autobiographical *Emily of New Moon* read as though they are re-writings of key moments in Warner's novel, with Emily cast as a far less long-suffering, less accepting version of Ellen. Compare, for example, Emily's first meeting with the volatile yet compelling Ilse Burnley with Ellen's encounter with the harum-scarum Nancy (*Emily* 112-115; *Wide, Wide World* 123 ff., or her immortally haughty rebuff to Cousin Oliver, "I don't *sell* my kisses," with Ellen's indignation at the kindly Mr Van Brunt's offer to rig her up a swing in exchange for a kiss (*Emily* 26, *Wide, Wide World* 116).

^v Although she would later claim that Matthew's death was simply a plot device to ensure "the necessity for self-sacrifice on Anne's part" (*Selected Journals* 2, 44), Anne's response to Matthew's death closely mirrors Montgomery's own wordless and despairing reaction to her father's death. See *Selected Journals* 1, 248-49.

^{vi} We might see Anne's feelings of shame, and her immediate provision of justification for Mrs Thomas' and Mrs Hammond's cruelty, as evidence of what Judith Herman calls "the double self." Herman writes, "When it is impossible to avoid the reality of the abuse, the child must construct some system of meaning which justifies it" (103).

^{vii} We can also add the parallel episodes of children dying of croup to this catalogue of similarities: Mary Vance saves Jims in *Rilla of Ingleside* (218-222), just as Anne saves Minnie May Barry in *Anne of Green Gables* (141-143).

^{viii} On Jacobs' manipulation of the conventions of the sentimental novel see Farah Jasmine Griffin (xx-xxi). See also Jacqueline Goldsby's analysis of the ways in which Jacobs managed to tell the truth of her tale, despite those elements that tested the limits of "chaste civility" (16-19).

^{ix} Morrison took this phrase as the title of her 1988 Tanner lecture on Human Values, but it appeared first in her 1987 novel, *Beloved* as a description of the aphasia that the traumatic history of slavery had imposed upon the "60 million and more...black and angry dead" to whom the novel is dedicated (199).

^x The phrase "demonic marriage" is Irene Gammel's ("My Secret Garden" 55); I use it here for its power to evoke the effective "sale" of Leslie's body and soul by her manipulative mother.

^{xi} Samuel Hynes details the unprecedented access that families on the Home Front had to newsreels, photographs, newspaper reports and letters during the First World War, describing it as "the first war a woman *could* imagine, and the first a woman could write into a novel" (viii-ix). Hynes does not take into account, however, the

horrifying consequences of such knowledge: namely, that while women did not know the precise whereabouts of their loved ones, they knew in excruciating detail exactly what kind of fate may have befallen them.

^{xii} Hegel terms this conflict, “the eternal irony of the community”—an irony embodied by “womankind.” The commitment of women to the natural ethics of “Divine Law” is a necessary precondition for the male citizen’s adoption of the “known law and prevailing custom” that is the Human Law of the community—a community from which women themselves are excluded. For Hegel, Antigone is the exemplar of womankind *par excellence* because her performance of burial rites for her dead brother reveals the Divine Law in its purest form. “The feminine, in the form of the sister, has the highest *intuitive* awareness of what is ethical.” Women—as epitomized by Antigone—are the “everlasting irony” or utter negativity of the community because although they are necessary to its reproduction, they will always privilege family over citizenship. This contestation continually brings the community to crisis, but for Hegel the resolution is always the affirmation of the state: an affirmation that is dialectically settled, but nevertheless necessarily ongoing (274-75, 288).

â€œ " Mute misery": Speaking the unspeakable in LM Montgomery's Anne books more. by Hilary Emmett. skip nav. ...Â In Heike Bartel and Anne Simon (Ed.), *Unbinding Medea: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Classical Myth from Antiquity to the 21st Century*. (pp. 250-262) Oxford, UK: Legenda Press. Publisher: espace.library.uq.edu.au. Publication Date: Jan 1, 2011. This contemporizing tendency is even more pronounced in Kamrath's book, which stakes a claim for Brown's postmodernity"that his carnivalesque, heteroglossic, and intertextual historicism anticipated the challenges to master narratives leveled by the thinkers of the 1960s. Barnard et al. propose that while Brown's letters and fictions are deeply embedded in eighteenth-century epistolary practices, his experimentation and the resultant self-reflexivity of the letters turned these writings into "laboratories" that pushed the envelope of what the epistolary mode could do in both personal and publi...Â "Mute misery": Speaking the unspeakable in L. M. Montgomery's Anne books. Article. Hilary Emmett. *Speaking the Unspeakable* book. Read reviews from world's largest community for readers.Â Goodreads helps you keep track of books you want to read. Start by marking "Speaking the Unspeakable" as Want to Read: Want to Read savingâ€| Want to Read. Currently Reading. Read. *Speaking the Unspeakable*. by Catherine Ann Collins. Other editions. Want to Read savingâ€|