

**THE SOUL GROWS BY LEAPS AND BOUNDS: ANALYZING THE  
DIARY STRUCTURE IN *RILLA OF INGLESIDE***

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## ABSTRACT

The Soul Grows By Leaps and Bounds: Analyzing the Diary Structure in *Rilla of Ingleside*

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*Rilla of Ingleside* (1921) is the final novel in L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* series. The novel tells the coming-of-age story of Rilla Blythe during the First World War and is partially made up of entries in Rilla's diary. This thesis explores the significance of the diary structure for Rilla's bildungsroman, examines the connections between *Rilla of Ingleside* and Montgomery's personal diaries, and argues that the novel should be seen as the beginning of a new direction for Montgomery's career. Rilla's diary, which often mirrors Montgomery's personal journals, is a unique insight into Rilla. It allows readers to see a side to Rilla that the third-person narrative often neglects to portray and emphasizes the diary structure's role as a tool for producing realistic fiction, which was Montgomery's goal in writing the novel. The last two chapters of the thesis deal with the critical conversation surrounding Montgomery and highlight common misconceptions about her treatment of female characters, attitude toward war, and use of the Romantic style. Finally, the thesis argues that *Rilla of Ingleside* is best understood as a watershed moment for Montgomery's writing because it contains elements (beginning with the diary structure) that come to define the works published in the later years of her life.

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## INTRODUCTION

L.M. Montgomery's *Rilla of Ingleside*, published in 1921, tells the story of Anne Shirley's youngest daughter, Rilla, who comes of age during the First World War. Rilla begins the story as an emotional, chronically ambitionless 14-year-old. By the novel's end, she has taken in and raised a war baby, established a Junior Red Cross in her community, and grown into a mature, capable young woman. She is, throughout, a diarist, and significant portions of the novel are made up by entries in her diary. The beginning of the novel finds her using her diary for childish venting, but the last entries tell of important events from the last days of the war. Over the course of four years of war, she has become sober and self-aware, realizing in her own time that her diary could be read by future generations as a record of life during the war: "I like to keep [writing in the diary] regularly, for Father says a diary of the years of the war should be a very interesting thing to hand down to one's children" (*Rilla of Ingleside* 177).

The function of Rilla's diary is twofold. It is a literary device, but it also helps link a work of fiction to the real, self-recorded experiences of women on the Homefront in WWI, notably its author, who was herself a lifelong diarist—entries in her diaries fill several published volumes. A close examination of her diary during the years of the First World War reveals that *Rilla of Ingleside* is largely autobiographical. L.M. Montgomery's choice to tell some of the most important points of Rilla as well as critical events in the war's timeline through her female protagonist's diary is key to understanding the story itself and its background as a historically accurate, largely autobiographical work. The narrative structure as a diary informs Rilla's bildungsroman and gives insight into Montgomery's personal life, providing a voice from the

often overlooked perspective of a female on the Homefront and functioning as a sign of changes to come for Montgomery's writing style.

## 1. DEFINING DIARY STRUCTURE AND THE BILDUNGSROMAN

In *The Diary Novel*, Lorna Martens defines the narrative structure of the diary as “a fictional prose narrative written from day to day by a single first-person narrator who does not address himself to a fictive addressee or recipient” (4). Martens here is distinguishing the diary novel from the epistolary novel, which is a series of letters addressed to a particular recipient. The difference is important to the narrator’s portrayal of self—in an epistolary novel, the narrator is curating his image for the recipient with whom he has a real relationship. Despite the differences between the two forms, Bernard Duyfhuizen argues that the diary novel finds its origins in the epistolary form: “Diary novels have been traditionally seen as descendants of both real diary writing and the epistolary novel, particularly single-writer epistolary fictions. Both forms employ the immediacy of writing within the midst of the experience while the future is always somewhat uncertain” (178). The result of the immediacy Duyfhuizen speaks to is a mimicked reality—a reproduction of nonfiction: “Ultimately, the diary symbolizes a myth of genuineness, an allegory of writing and reading the world” (178). As a reproduction of nonfiction, the diary novel is a compelling candidate for stories about significant real-world events, such as war novels like *Rilla of Ingleside*.

At the heart of *Rilla of Ingleside* is Rilla’s coming-of-age story, or bildungsroman. Petra Rau defines the bildungsroman according to its history as a male coming-of-age story:

The Bildungsroman (the novel of personal development or of education) originated in Germany in the latter half of the 18th century and has since become one of the major narrative genres in European and Anglo-American literature. It charts the protagonist’s actual or metaphorical journey from youth to maturity.



Initially the aim of this journey is reconciliation between the desire for individuation (self-fulfilment) and the demands of socialisation (adaptation to a given social reality). (“Bildungsroman”)

Rilla’s bildungsroman is set apart from Rau’s definition because it is an example of a female bildungsroman, which contains notable differences from its male counterpart, including a wishing to be male, reverence for motherhood, and marriage, if included, after establishing independence (72). Each of these features appears in *Rilla of Ingleside*. For instance, speaking on Rilla’s despondent claims early in the novel that she is unable to help the war effort because she is female, Amy Tector asserts that Rilla’s “dissatisfaction with a society that offers so few options for women’ is a characteristic of the female Bildungsroman” (81). Rilla spends the rest of the novel discovering and pursuing the options she does have to help the war effort, thus furthering her female bildungsroman and setting her up for her engagement to Kenneth Ford, which occurs after she has proven her worth to society and established independence.

## 2. RILLA'S BILDUNGSROMAN

The 14-year-old Rilla we meet at the beginning of the novel plans to fill the next four years of her life with fun, not college: “There’s bound to be a dunce in every family. I’m quite willing to be a dunce if I can be a pretty, popular, delightful one” (*Rilla of Ingleside* 16). She is devoid of ambition and takes virtually nothing in life seriously. When war breaks out, Rilla is wildly unprepared for the upheaval it brings to her idyllic existence. In the early days of the war, Rilla is swept up in the romance and excitement it seems to bring and is proud that her brother Jem is among the first to enlist. He inspires her to contribute to the war effort: “I’m only a girl—I can’t do anything to win the war—but I must do something to help at home” (*Rilla* 52). For instance, although Rilla hates babies, she takes in the newborn of a dead neighbor to save him from growing up in an orphanage. She rises faithfully to the challenge her father sets when she brings the baby home—she must raise him herself rather than relying on the family for help with his care. Baby Jims gives Rilla an opportunity to follow through on her resolution to be “as brave and heroic and unselfish as I can possibly be” (53). In committing herself to him, she is proving her dedication to keeping the faith on the Homefront by raising a serviceman’s child.

Recognizing in Rilla a real desire to make a difference, her mother suggests that she organize a Junior Red Cross. Rilla does not believe at first that she is capable of such a thing, but soon discovers that she has “a certain aptitude” for it (*Rilla* 53). Rilla’s work with the Junior Red Cross is the first step she takes toward maturity. When she embraces her mother’s suggestion to organize the Junior Red Cross, she demonstrates that she no longer believes that she, a girl, has no place in the war effort. It’s also a drastic change from her introductory characterization, in

which we are told that Rilla has no aspirations or any ambition at all. Now she is caught up in the desire to do something, anything, to help the cause.

By the end of the novel, Rilla is older and wiser than her nineteen years. She is committed to “keeping the faith” with her brother Walter, who is killed at Courcelette midway through the novel. She has promised to live for him and for the idealistic New Canada for which he has sacrificed his life. Her mother, who had described her early on as the only one of her children to lack ambition, praises her maturity: “She used to be such an irresponsible young creature. She has changed into a capable, womanly girl and she is such a comfort to me” (*Rilla* 258). As the world returns to normalcy, parts of her personality that have lain dormant are allowed to bloom again. The last pages of the novel depict a Rilla who has sobered, but not changed completely. For example, the very last line of the novel sees her lisping “yeth” to assure Ken that she still considers herself betrothed to him. This is a callback to her childhood lisping habit that shows up in earlier sections of the novel when she is embarrassed and mostly serves as comic relief. Here, it is an indicator that Rilla can still be flustered and overcome by “girlish” passions. She has not entirely morphed into a stoic, even-keeled adult.

Rilla’s diary, which appears early in the novel and by its end makes up large portions of the narrative, neatly tracks her bildungsroman. At the outset, it is a place for her to vent. The world seems unfair and she seeks solace in her diary, exposing her immaturity in a series of emotional outbursts—on one occasion, Rilla “[relieves] her feelings in a stormy fit of tears” by writing in her diary in Rainbow Valley after a revelation of bad war news, the day before meeting Jims (60). As the story progresses, the entries comprise a sober, accurate record of life on the Homefront. Mirroring her growth into a responsible, community-focused young woman, this shift is marked by Rilla’s choice to begin dating entries. The first dated entry is accompanied

by an acknowledgment that she writes frequently because future generations might read her ‘war diary’: “I like to keep it up regularly, for father says a diary of the years of the war should be a very interesting thing to hand down to one’s children” (177).

The latter portions of the novel find entire chapters told in Rilla’s voice alone. Her diary makes up some of the most important parts of the book and of the war. Chapter 32, “Word from Jem,” chronicles life at the end of the war, but most importantly includes the moment in which the Blythes learn Jem is alive. It is significant that Montgomery gives Rilla the honor of recording the novel’s most joyous twist in her own words—she is now telling her own story, the reliability of her narration having been proven throughout the pages of the novel by her growing maturity. Early entries of Rilla’s diary stand apart from the third-person narrative and are comprised largely of emotional outbursts, contributing character insight but not plot details. As the novel draws to a close, the two (character insight and plot details) are closely intertwined.

Having taken on a role beyond venting and even beyond its expressed function as a record to hand down to her children, Rilla’s diary is now a vehicle for thoughtful introspection. For example, Chapter 32 opens with Rilla reflecting on the four year anniversary of the lighthouse dance, the fateful evening from the novel’s beginning that finds her first dance spoiled by England’s declaration of war. Four years later, she is nineteen, but says she feels much older—a moment comparable to one from the early days of war when she thinks about the night of the dance and expresses the same sentiment. The narrator interjects in the earlier moment to say that perhaps Rilla does feel older, as young people are not able to take things in stride because they have not learned that “this, too, will pass away” (*Rilla of Ingleside* 35). Thus, in the early moment, the notion that Rilla feels older is a sign of her immaturity. Four years to the day after the dance, however, as she writes in her diary that she feels as if she’s lived a lifetime in

four years and reflects at length on how she has changed, there is no trace of wry commentary from the narrator to negate her.

Crucial to the diary's significance is the fact that it allows readers to see a side to Rilla that the third-person narrative often neglects to portray. As Rilla matures, the third-person narrative begins to present her as she appears to her community: leader of the Junior Reds, mother to a war baby, and faithful sister to her brothers on the front. However, the diary allows for a more intimate glimpse into a Rilla who is still very much a teenager struggling to find her footing in a world turned upside down by the war. This glimpse aligns with Lorna Martens's observation that the diary structure is able to depict the self as it exists in the present, a phenomenon that allows Rilla's diary to be a useful tool for her bildungsroman (*The Diary Novel* 5). We see her at different points as she sees herself and can trace the evolution of her sense of self throughout the novel. She reflects in later entries on her past self, but we see her mostly in "real time." She is not crafting her own bildungsroman from the perspective of a wise older woman looking back on her youth. Her youth tells the story, giving us moments of foolishness (wearing mismatched shoes to a social call, or spending too much on a new hat) framed by her preoccupation with only the present, not the lessons these moments could hold. Our perception of Rilla in her diary entries is an unfettered insight into her "real" self that is juxtaposed with her characterization in the wider narrative.

### 3. *RILLA OF INGLESIDE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY*

The First World War found Montgomery, much like her protagonist, in the throes of early motherhood—she already had one son, would lose her second just two weeks after England declared war, and welcomed a third before the war’s end. Consequently, an autobiographical connection that cannot be overlooked is the link between Montgomery’s second son Hugh, who was stillborn in 1914, and Rilla’s foray into motherhood with Jims. It is perplexing at the outset that Montgomery would choose motherhood to depict the maturation of her teenage protagonist, but it begins to make sense when it is considered that Montgomery lost her baby boy just two weeks into the war—almost exactly the amount of time elapsing between the dance at the lighthouse at which England’s declaration of war is announced and the day Rilla brings home an orphaned neighbor baby in a soup tureen. Rilla spends most of the novel raising a life for the New Canada, a task that Montgomery, sadly, was not able to undertake with her second son. The presence of Jims serves as a powerful, and the first of many, autobiographical elements in Montgomery’s war novel. Like Rilla, Montgomery had a brother at the front and was unable to escape her fear that he would be killed: “I waken in the night and picture my boyish brother in the shell-swept trenches, picture him dying horribly there, far from everyone who loves him” (149). Rilla’s wartime experience is similarly focused on the plight of the three Blythe boys—one of whom will never return home.

As evidenced by the above quote, the war weighed heavily on Montgomery. In a letter to an American friend published in *The Boston Evening Transcript* in 1915, she wrote, “We are at war—at close grips with a deadly and determined enemy. We live and breathe in its shadows. Never for one moment is the strain lifted” (“This Hideous War” 149). However, insight into

Montgomery during the war does not come solely from her published words during this time. Montgomery processed the events of the war, as she did the rest of her life, in her diary. She began keeping a diary at a young age and continued to do so throughout her life. Entries from her diary have been collected and published in a staggering five volumes, with entries spanning from 1880 to 1942, the year of her death. She recorded world events and domestic news alike, pontificating on politics and love—no subject was too small or too great to be written down.

During the war, Montgomery recorded events from her daily life with thorough analysis, but from the outset she also began to write down news about the war. Beyond simply writing about the war in a general sense, she reported dates and details with precise accuracy. Her attention to detail makes her diary during the years of the war a useful source on the exact history of the First World War—and it is no surprise, then, that she used her own diary after the war’s end for material when writing *Rilla of Ingleside*. Montgomery turned to her diary to style the novel’s most important historical scenes. The chapter “Black Sunday,” tracing the day in which the world waited to see if Venice would fall to the Germans, is largely an adaptation of her diary entry dealing with the same date. This section of the novel, including the chapter solely made up of Rilla’s newly dated journaling style, reads almost as simply a fictionalized version of Montgomery’s diary.

Before the shift to dated entries, explicit references to Montgomery’s diary are confined to the third-person narration. After the shift, entries from Rilla’s diary begin to pull directly from Montgomery’s diary as well, which is significant because it emphasizes the weight Rilla’s first-person narration has started to hold. On March 22, 1918, Montgomery began her entry about the beginning of the war’s end with, “Armageddon has begun!” (*Selected Journals* 242). An entry in Rilla’s diary, dated just one day later (March 23), opens with the same phrase (*Rilla of Ingleside*

233). Beyond direct quotations from Montgomery's diary, Rilla's diary includes numerous examples of paraphrasing. On November 7, 1917, Montgomery wrote: "But the Piave line must hold or Venice will fall to the Hun—an unthinkable catastrophe. They must not get it. They must not" (*Selected Journals* 228). Rilla reports on the same events in an entry dated six days earlier (November 1), writing, "Gertrude keeps saying desperately, 'They must not get Venice, they must not get Venice,' as if by saying it often enough she can prevent it...Susan and Gertrude and I say they must hold it, because Venice must be saved, so what are the military critics to do?" (*Rilla* 291). These explicit parallels reinforce the connection between Montgomery's diary and *Rilla of Ingleside* and speak to her growing desire to write a novel that reflected reality.

Before writing *Rilla*, Montgomery was starting to become frustrated with the lack of "real life" her *Anne* books contained (*Selected Journals* 170). At odds with her publisher over *Rilla*'s immediate predecessor *Rainbow Valley*, Montgomery wrote, "I'm tired of this kind. I've outgrown it. But my publishers keep me at this sort of stuff because it sells and because they claim that the public, having become used to this from my pen, would not tolerate a change" (278). It becomes clear in her journals that Montgomery set out to write what she then intended to be one last addition to the *Anne* series—a novel that would hold certain similarities to previous *Anne* books, but would diverge in its pursuit of realism. To accomplish this goal, she used a format central to her own life. In fact, while she was writing *Rilla of Ingleside*, Montgomery was in the process of copying over her lifetime of diary entries into volumes, making journaling during this period an even bigger presence in her life (*Selected Journals* 341). As Martens argues, authors' perception of real diaries are crucial to their crafting of fictional diaries: "[Diary] novels have always had something to do with what the authors thought real diaries were—whether they were outright imitations of the real object, whether they merely absorbed



certain connotations of the idea of the diary, or whether they used real diaries as negative models for parody or the like” (*The Diary Novel* 25). In the case of *Rilla*, the diary structure is inextricably linked to Montgomery’s diary.

The diary structure is a large part of what makes *Rilla of Ingleside* a shift in direction from *Rainbow Valley* because as a narrative style it gets perhaps the closest to reality within the genre of fiction—Martens writes that “the diary novel is mimetic of what could be a real situation” (*The Diary Novel* 6). *Rilla* could have been a novel based loosely around the First World War, as the rest of the *Anne* books are based loosely on Canada around the turn of the 20th Century. Instead, it is a novel concerned with specificity. The timeline of the novel tracks the progression of the war exactly, with even offhand remarks about politicians and brief mentions of foreign cities on the front corresponding to the appropriate dates and contexts. This attention to detail serves to emphasize the differences between *Rilla of Ingleside* and much of Montgomery’s work—particularly the dreaminess of the rest of the *Anne* series. *Rilla*’s historical accuracy confirms Montgomery’s desire to write something different, something close to “real-life.” *Rilla of Ingleside* falls neatly into a time in which young people pouring out their private thoughts into the pages of a diary became a popular activity within the social norm, providing yet another tie to reality (Martens 185). *Rilla* as a diarist in this context is not just a reproduction of Montgomery’s war experience, she possesses an appropriate trait for a teenage protagonist of the early 20th Century.

*Rilla of Ingleside* is a perfect example of the diary novel as a reproduction of a real situation given its concern with actual historical events and its ties to Montgomery’s diary. *Rilla* is not known to be Montgomery’s most autobiographical character—that distinction goes to Emily of the *Emily of New Moon* trilogy, who is notably also a diarist. However, Montgomery’s

choice to make the backdrop of *Rilla of Ingleside* her own diary and on top of that to give the protagonist a voice through the diary structure is to establish a link between herself and Rilla. Martens writes that “the conception of the diary is the most mimetic aspect of the diary novel, so that the reader who would study the diary novel is usually referred back to genuine journals of the same period” (*The Diary Novel* 26). We know that the very concept of Rilla recording her life during the war, along with the types of things she writes about and the way they are portrayed are all mimicking the real situation of Montgomery’s Homefront life.

#### 4. *RILLA OF INGLESIDE AND CRITICAL CONVERSATION*

Despite Montgomery's desire to do something different in writing *Rilla of Ingleside*, her writing style at this time remained fairly traditional and true to Romantic convention. While many writers of this period were employing new techniques, such as stream-of-consciousness, to explore themes of realism and nihilism, Montgomery spent many years writing as she always had. As Jen Rubio notes in the introduction to her annotated *Rilla of Ingleside*, "Montgomery...was no modernist. Her perspective on art was in some respects more traditional: when art may be all we have left, surely it has a duty to lift, to inspire, and to teach qualities of forbearance and courage rather than to give way to aesthetic revulsion" (ix). *Rilla of Ingleside* marks Montgomery's first foray into a more modern realism, but it is a work that is nonetheless characterized by her fanciful, imaginative style. For example, toward the end of the novel and in the midst of some of the war's darkest days, the chapter "Susan has a Proposal of Marriage" finds the town's much-loathed German sympathizer asking Susan to marry him—enraged, she chases him out of the Blythe home with an iron pot, providing a welcome moment of comic relief. And of course, the novel also features the characteristically wholesome romance of Rilla and Ken. Colin Hill notes that Montgomery was one of many writers during this time to struggle with modernism: "[Montgomery's] struggle parallels that of many of her contemporaries who, even as they approached their modern subjects with an uncompromising realism, were unwilling or unable to abandon tried and true romantic conventions" ("Generic Confusion" 67). Montgomery would make a more complete transition to modern realism in her later life—as the last chapter of this thesis will argue—but the result of this early struggle is a novel that deals

with modern themes through a romantic lens. Tragedy is met with optimism and forbearance, particularly in the case of Rilla, who unquestionably blossoms during the war.

Montgomery's choice to cast the war in a hopeful, positive light despite being privately so destroyed by its effects is consistent with most of her body of work. Her early novels are largely devoid of nihilism, particularly in regard to love and relationships, though she was by contrast unlucky in love and regretted her eventual marriage to the father of her children. She wrote in her journal before she married him that she did not love him and had serious reservations about marrying a minister due to her passionate, but unorganized approach to religion. In later years, he would tell her that he wished she and their sons had never been born because he did not believe they were of "the elect" (Brennan 254). Considering these troubling facts, it would make sense for Montgomery to jump at the chance to write an entirely different kind of novel than *Rilla of Ingleside* is and explore the themes other writers were starting to develop—her private life seems primed for translation into bleak, modernist writing and the throwing off of Romantic convention. And yet she clings to beauty and romance.

Just as styles in literature were beginning to shift, the role of women in society underwent great change during the war. Sandra Gilbert describes the effects of the war on women as "female inspiration empowered by male desperation" and posits that the First World War was characterized by conflict between the front and the Homefront, with women eagerly taking up the spaces in society that men left behind ("Soldier's Heart"). In addition to traveling to the front to work with the Red Cross, women were taking new jobs at home—many of which had previously been held by men. According to Gilbert, despite the unequivocal tragedy the war brought, this time in history was a liberating one for women: "With no sense of inherited history to lose...women in the terrible war years of 1914-18 would seem to have had, if not everything,

at least something to gain: a place in public history, a chance, even, to make history” (427-428). Montgomery’s portrayal of the female characters of *Rilla*, who find purpose and passion in their new roles on the Homefront, neatly tracks with Gilbert’s argument. Rilla, previously ambitionless, makes a name for herself in the community. She expresses gratitude for the change the war has brought about in her, although she is at every turn conscious of the horrors that have been its primary consequence. Toward the end of the war, she reflects, “I expected that these past four years would be the most delightful years of my life, and instead they have been years of war—years of fear and grief and worry—but I humbly hope, of a little growth in strength and character as well” (258). Though considerably weighed down by the cost of the war, Rilla has seized the opportunity for progress that Gilbert describes.

Despite this, Montgomery is sometimes criticized for not being feminist enough and for writing unprogressive female characters—Elizabeth Epperly claims that Rilla cannot be accepted as a feminist character “without some qualifiers” because she does not want a career outside of the home (*The Fragrance of Sweet Grass* 130). However, Montgomery’s heroines, and Rilla in particular, cannot be relegated to dated, unprogressive reflections of historical womanhood. They are progressive in their own right. Amy Tector states that Montgomery’s focus on the Homefront serves to empower her female characters: “She makes it clear that women have a definite role to play in victory...[Montgomery’s] real agenda is to value the work on the home front. Through Rilla and Susan, Montgomery clearly indicates the possibilities the war has brought for women” (85). We see women in *Rilla of Ingleside* working for the Red Cross, raising funds and collecting supplies for the war effort. Susan is one of many women to keep the Homefront running by bringing in crops in the absence of men. Rilla spends the entire novel proving the value of women to society while the world is at war, a possibility even she doubts in the beginning.

Montgomery's adherence to Gilbert's model in her portrayal of the war in *Rilla of Ingleside* sets up an interesting contrast with the way she processed it privately in her diary. Despite her patriotism, the war was not personally liberating for Montgomery. It triggered the major depression that would characterize the rest of her life. She believed in the righteous nature of the war, but it was not a source for personal celebration of female freedom. With a brother at the front, her most pressing concern was the plight of soldiers and the horrors they experienced, as well as the hardships the war brought to the rest of the world.

Interestingly, much of the scholarly conversation around *Rilla of Ingleside* deals with Montgomery's portrayal of the First World War. In a published letter to her friend Ephraim Weber in 1916, Montgomery neatly summed up her views: "It is a death-grapple between freedom and tyranny, between modern and medieval ideas...between the principles of democracy and militarism. I believe that it is the most righteous war that England ever waged and worthy of every drop of Canadian blood" (*After Green Gables: L.M. Montgomery's Letters to Ephraim Weber, 1916-1941* 61). This staunch patriotism has prompted critiques that she wrote the novel as war propaganda. For instance, Margery Fee and Ruth Cawker argue: "Rilla degenerates into a chauvinistic tract for Canadian support of Great Britain in World War One" (*Canadian Fiction: An Annotated Bibliography* 76). While much of the scholarly conversation surrounding *Rilla's* glorification of the war dates to the 1970s, the sentiment is actually as old as the novel itself, meaning Montgomery was aware of the criticism. Characteristically, we find her side of the story outlined in her journal. Referencing a reader who criticized *Rilla* for war-mongering, she wrote: "Can't the poor moron realize the difference between offensive and defensive war. I wrote Rilla not to 'glorify war' but to glorify the courage and patriotism and self-sacrifice it evoked" (*Selected Journals* 77). In a sense, Montgomery is doing in *Rilla* exactly

what Gilbert outlines in her article. She is showcasing certain opportunities the war brings her characters by painting them in a positive light.

*Rilla* focuses on the courage, patriotism, and self-sacrifice required by those waiting on the Canadian Homefront. Montgomery is not celebrating the war—she is recognizing the triumph of the human spirit that we often find during dark periods in history. The characteristics she glorifies are referenced in connection to the struggles from which they have been born. She is not recklessly calling for mothers to give up their sons or for young men to blindly surrender their lives for the good of a vaguely outlined cause overseas. At every turn, her characters grapple with the cost they are being asked to pay. When the youngest Blythe son turns eighteen, he asks his mother’s permission to enlist. She struggles with the decision: “Two of my sons have gone and one will never return. Must I give you, too, Shirley?” (205). She eventually relents and he enlists, going off to war “in a cool, business-like mood, as of one doing something rather dirty and disagreeable, that had just got to be done” (207). This is not the language of a propagandist. Even Walter, who is responsible for some of the novel’s most idealistic lines, enlists not primarily for the sake of the cause, but to “save [his] soul alive” after many months of wrestling with accusations of cowardice (86). There is a line between believing in the justice of a cause and being an outright propagandist. Montgomery falls on the right side of that line because she does not devalue the war’s cost. Rather than glossing over the price Canadians have paid, she makes that the focus of the novel.

## 5. MONTGOMERY'S TRANSITION TO MODERN REALISM

Most criticism on L.M. Montgomery's work focuses on the first six *Anne* books, which are unquestionably her most enduring works and are responsible for her place in popular culture. However, it is an oversight to make claims about Montgomery's attitude toward World War I, and war in general, without looking closely at her post-*Rilla* publications. Montgomery was always at odds with her publisher over how far she should stray from the child-friendly world of *Anne* and each book published after *Rilla of Ingleside* contains hints of a much more progressive writer than the version of her we have immortalized as the author of *Anne of Green Gables*. An examination of the last two *Anne* books, published over a decade after *Rilla*, as well as her work outside the *Anne* series during this period, provides not only a look into her attitude about war, but reveals a clear shift in direction for Montgomery's writing style, at least thematically, toward both modernist and feminist content.

During the writing process for *Rilla*, Montgomery made comments in her journal stating that she didn't want to write more *Anne* books and instead wanted to begin something new: "I am done with Anne forever—I swear it as a dark and deadly vow. I want to create a new heroine now—she's already an embryo in my mind...Her name is Emily" (390). For a while, Montgomery was true to her vow, going on to publish the three *Emily* novels in 1923, 1925, and 1927. However, in 1934, the first talking film adaption of *Anne of Green Gables* was released and renewed public interest led to Montgomery's publisher convincing her to write new additions for the *Anne* series (Brennan 255). Begrudgingly, she complied—*Anne of Windy Poplars* was published in 1936 and *Anne of Ingleside* followed in 1939. These late additions are set between the earlier *Anne* books chronologically, falling fourth and sixth, respectively, but



they do not fall seamlessly into place with the dreamy, romantic tone of the other pre-*Rilla* and pre-war installments. Rather, they mark a clear departure in tone that is consistent with Montgomery's body of work following World War I. Notably, each of the books contains references from Anne to the horror of war, moments that are reminiscent of an instance in *Rainbow Valley*, Montgomery's first work published after the war in 1919, that finds Jem wishing to be a soldier, with subsequent narration warning of the sorrow this wish coming true will entail.

The first such reference in the post-*Rilla* novels comes in *Anne of Windy Poplars*, which finds Anne holding a principalship in the years between graduating college and her marriage to Gilbert. The novel is epistolary, made up largely of Anne's letters to Gilbert. In one such letter midway through the novel, she writes: "I have to give a little 'lecturette' tomorrow on the War of 1812. It seems so strange to read over the stories of those old wars...things that can never happen again. I don't suppose any of us will ever have more than an academic interest in 'battles long ago.' It's impossible to think of Canada ever being at war again. I am so thankful that phase of history is over" (124). This comment feels out-of-place coming from Anne because she is an intelligent woman—it seems odd for her to be so emphatic about war never being a reality for Canada again when some parts of the world are almost always notably at war. Additionally, Rilla's age at the beginning of *Rilla of Ingleside* gives the rest of the *Anne* books a traceable, approximate timeline—*Anne of Windy Poplars* takes place in the late 1880s. While the War of 1812 would seem like an event of the distant past and Canada has not been involved in many major conflicts barring the world wars, other significant wars (such as the American Civil War) have taken place in Anne's lifetime. Montgomery did not set the *Anne* books (with the exception of *Rilla*) in very particular points in history and it is very rare for her characters to mention world

events at all. In the early books, there are passing references to Canadian political parties, but they lack the specificity of *Rilla*. However, the *Windy Poplars* moment is not an isolated occurrence.

This sentiment is nearly identical to the one Anne expresses to Diana in *Anne of Ingleside*, which is set nearly ten years prior. On a visit to Diana, the two discuss the desire of Diana's son to be a soldier when he grows up. The idea upsets Diana and Anne comforts her by saying: "I wouldn't worry over that. He'll forget about it when another fancy seizes him. War is a thing of the past" (12). Again, one is struck by the oddity of this comment, but given the publication dates, it is probably not a coincidence that these books foreshadow Canada's involvement with war.

Having written *Rilla* over a decade prior, Montgomery uses moments in these last two novels to retroactively foreshadow what is to come for Anne. She is effectively filling in the gaps of Anne's charmed existence in a way that points toward the final chronological installment of the series. But more importantly, she is revealing a look into her thinking in the years between World War I and World War II. Her mental health had been declining since the outbreak of World War I, with the war's impact being compounded by her best friend dying in the flu epidemic of 1918 and her husband's mental health putting a strain on their already unhealthy marriage. As tensions began to build in Europe in the late 1930s, Montgomery wrote in her journal that she didn't think another war would happen or could happen. When threat of war became reality, it proved to be the final straw for Montgomery's already fragile emotional state. In a letter to a friend after World War II began, she wrote: "The war situation kills me along with many other things. I expect conscription will come in and they will take my second son and then I will give up all effort to recover because I shall have nothing to live for" (*My Dear Mr. M:*

*Letters to G.B. MacMillan from L.M. Montgomery* 204). Her mental health would continue to decline in the next few years and she is widely believed, most notably by her granddaughter Kate MacDonald Butler, to have committed suicide in 1942. In a 2008 *Globe and Mail* article, Butler wrote: “What has never been revealed is that L.M. Montgomery took her own life at the age of 67 through a drug overdose” (“The Heartbreaking Truth About Anne’s Creator”). With this context, it seems likely that the quotes from Anne on war in the series’ late additions are actually Montgomery grappling with her dread of Canada possibly heading toward involvement in another war.

Strengthening this theory is the obscure, posthumously-published final addition to Anne’s world, *The Blythes are Quoted*. The book contains short stories and poems written and commented upon by Anne and other members of the Blythe family. While Montgomery submitted the manuscript, which notably included Walter’s poem “The Piper,” for the book to her publisher in the last days before her death in 1942, it was not published in its entirety until Benjamin Lefebvre resurrected it in 2009. In her afterward to this edition, Elizabeth Rollins Epperly provides an explanation for this delay: the book contains a “scorching indictment of the First World War, if not the Second” that would have rendered it unpatriotic and unpublishable during WWII (513). The last page of the novel finds Anne and Jem discussing a poem written by Walter about the aftermath of bayonetting a man in battle. “I am thankful now, Jem,” Anne says, “that Walter did not come back. He could never have lived with his memories...and if he had seen the futility of the sacrifice they made then mirrored in this ghastly holocaust...” (Montgomery 510). Scholars’ choice to center the conversation around *Rilla of Ingleside* and Montgomery herself on glorification of war is a curiously incomplete interpretation given the staunchly anti-war message present in the last few *Anne* books. While Montgomery’s journal

entries containing anti-war sentiments and *The Blythes are Quoted*, her most direct criticism of war in fiction, were not available to scholars in the 20th Century, her published work available at the time should stand on its own.

Similarly, criticisms relegating Montgomery to the Romantic sentiment and labelling her handling of female characters as unprogressive, as some scholars have done, should more accurately be made against her publisher's concern with public opinion, not Montgomery herself. The writing of *Rilla of Ingleside* is a watershed moment for Montgomery's career, with each subsequent book featuring elements that simultaneously challenge Montgomery's public image and interact with modern themes and feminist attitudes. Even the diary structure and inclusion of letters from the front in *Rilla* are signs of things to come for Montgomery's writing style: the *Emily* books are peppered with entries from Emily's diary, while *Windy Poplars* is a solidly epistolary novel.

This shift in Montgomery's writing is apparent in the final two *Anne* books alone. *Anne of Windy Poplars* required significant revision before its publication because Montgomery's publisher deemed it too dark, citing overly grotesque descriptions of death (Wood 8). The existing edition contains toned-down, but still decidedly unsettling imagery—at one point, Anne receives descriptions from a townswoman of every cause of death in the cemetery she frequents. Likewise, *Anne of Ingleside* deals with Anne's children's overwhelming fear of death—a six-year-old Walter is so afraid she will die giving birth to Rilla that he walks home from a friend's house in the middle of the night to check on her. Later in the novel, Anne's oldest daughter Nan makes a harrowing bargain with God that she will spend the night in a "haunted" graveyard if He will prevent Anne from dying of pneumonia. *Anne of Ingleside* even threatens to dismantle Anne

and Gilbert's idealistic romance as Anne fears Gilbert has fallen out of love with her, mirroring the unhappiness of Montgomery's own marriage.

After writing the *Anne* books, Montgomery was reportedly frustrated with her publisher for not allowing her to explore more daring aspects of female sexuality in her contribution to Gothic tradition, the *Emily* books. This is a victory she would eventually win with *The Blue Castle* (1926), which, as Mary Henley Rubio has noted, was banned by some libraries for a time due to its mature content (*The Gift of Wings* 333). Another late novel, *Magic for Marigold*, features a female doctor who continues working after marriage. This is a particularly significant choice given the abundant criticism of Anne's swift transition from an adventurous, college-educated career woman to background character after she becomes a mother.

With the exception of *Rilla of Ingleside*, most scholars have ignored Montgomery's transition to a more modern realism. *Rilla* is regarded as an outlier—Colin Hill cites it as an example of Montgomery struggling as an author to fully accept modernity—but it is better understood as a first attempt to move into modernism by an author who was hampered by readers' expectations, not her loyalty to romantic convention. The conversation on Montgomery's place in literary history too often begins and ends with the *Anne* books. However, as argued in this thesis, just as the series itself does not end with *Rilla*, more attention should be given to *Rilla of Ingleside* as Montgomery's first contribution to a shockingly comprehensive second act.

## CONCLUSION

*Rilla of Ingleside* is not a story from the front. It very deliberately portrays the North American Homefront as capable of serving as the backdrop for a war story. The female characters at the heart of the novel are doing real, important things at home during the years of the war. It is worth noting in this context that Montgomery could have written a more sensational, exciting story about Rilla's older sisters or their friend Faith Meredith, who spend the war overseas working with the English Red Cross. She chose to do otherwise—a choice that according to Andrea McKenzie has caused the novel to linger in obscurity: “Montgomery’s transformation of the traditionally European-centred, male-oriented war story into this form has contributed to *Rilla of Ingleside*’s omission from international studies of wartime literature, including those that focus on women’s war literature” (“Women at War” 326). Colin Hill also makes the point that as a record of the Homefront, *Rilla of Ingleside* stands apart from most novels from the First World War: “*Rilla* is one of very few early twentieth-century novels, Canadian or foreign, to offer a sustained and sociological examination of the impact of the Great War on the life of an entire community” (“Generic Confusion” 65). In choosing to write a less sensational war novel, Montgomery actually provides an important record of society during a tumultuous period that would otherwise go largely undocumented in fiction.

By placing the diary structure at the heart of *Rilla of Ingleside*, Montgomery gives her female protagonist the chance to tell the story of an undervalued wartime perspective in her own written words. *Rilla* is a rare example of a female-centric Homefront novel from the First World War, making Montgomery’s decision to give Rilla a voice even more significant (Rubio ix). Not content to tell a straightforward coming-of-age story in the third person narration, Montgomery

provides another angle for insight into Rilla: the diary. By allowing Rilla to characterize herself through her diary, Montgomery further emphasizes the female voice and makes Rilla's bildungsroman richer. What starts out as a benign adolescent hobby becomes a central aspect of the novel's structure and an important record of the war as told by a sober, thoughtful young woman, as Hill observes:

Rilla's entries begin as trite and idealistic musings on the nature of romance, but by the end of the novel, they reflect the intellectual seriousness and practicality she has acquired as a result of her war experience...[the entries] increasingly reveal a mature understanding of the larger world, the nature of human relationships, and the social, political, and historical dimensions of the war. (66)

The narrative structure of the diary in *Rilla of Ingleside* provides rich dimension to the story and to the real-world events it traces. In giving Rilla a diary, Montgomery is providing her with the tool to document her own bildungsroman, a practice that is meaningful to Montgomery given her own lifelong penchant for journaling. The diary acting as a voice for its female protagonist as well as pointing to the personal voice of its author is a timely means of connecting Montgomery to the modern era, which feels appropriate for a novel that marks her shift into more realistic fiction. In turning away from Romantic convention, Montgomery turned to a practice (journaling) that is as relevant today as it was familiar for her. Shortly after writing *Rilla of Ingleside*, Montgomery turned to her diary to grieve her best friend Frederica, who succumbed to the flu epidemic of 1918. *Rilla* is dedicated to her memory. As we close out a year filled with extraordinary events (2020), Rilla's diary and the similar circumstances of its creation serve as a reminder of how the historic record is formed and the importance of telling our own stories for future generations.

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