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POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

Heather Thomson

AUTEUR DE LA THÈSE / AUTHOR OF THESIS

M.A. (English)

GRADE / DEGREE

Department of English

FACULTÉ, ÉCOLE, DÉPARTEMENT / FACULTY, SCHOOL, DEPARTMENT

“I think it well to search for truth everywhere”:
Religious Identity and the Construction of the Self in L.M. Montgomery’s *Selected Journals*

TITRE DE LA THÈSE / TITLE OF THESIS

Janice Fiamengo

DIRECTEUR (DIRECTRICE) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS SUPERVISOR

CO-DIRECTEUR (CO-DIRECTRICE) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS CO-SUPERVISOR

Mary Arseneau

Gerald Lynch

Gary W. Slater

Le Doyen de la Faculté des études supérieures et postdoctorales / Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

“I think it well to search for truth everywhere”:
RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF IN
L.M. MONTGOMERY’S *SELECTED JOURNALS*

Heather Thomson

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University of Ottawa

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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the religious identity that Lucy Maud Montgomery constructed in *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery*. As an adequate theoretical model to study religion in modern autobiography is not available, this thesis approaches the *Selected Journals* with a “social construction” model (adapted from autobiography theory on gender) in a consideration of her religious identity. Montgomery’s religious self-constructions—as unorthodox, Presbyterian, and a seeker of truth—are considered in successive chapters through close readings of passages from her journals. Though her separate self-constructions are apparently paradoxical, I argue that Montgomery’s overall religious identity is nonetheless fairly consistent with her most crucial religious self-construction—that of being a seeker of truth—and that she ultimately presents herself in her journals as having faith centred on hope. In conclusion, I offer reflections on the need for the development of an autobiography theory in which religion is regarded as an important aspect of identity.

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INTRODUCTION

The Selected Journals of L M Montgomery have, as Benjamin Lefebvre writes, “fueled” scholarly activity in Montgomery studies since their publication by Oxford University Press beginning in 1985 (6). Since this time, critics have increasingly noted tensions in Montgomery’s writing, especially when comparing her fiction with her journals.¹ Montgomery’s journals contain the “darker side” of the woman who had been commonly seen, as Mary Rubio—one of the co-editors of the *Selected Journals (SJ)*—put it, as “someone who wrote only sentimental, escapist, rosy-coloured fictions” (“Subverting the Trite” 13).² Fans and scholars alike who were familiar with her novels about young heroines

¹ For MA theses which compare and/or contrast Montgomery’s fiction and her life writing, see for example Denyse Elaine Yeast’s “Negotiating and Articulating a Self: An Intertextual Reading of L M Montgomery’s Public and Private Writings” (1986), Mary-Margaret Klempa’s “Passionate Blood, Puritan Conscience: An Intertextual Study of the Private and Public Works of L M Montgomery” (1998), and Keli Jo T. Healey’s “Keeping Out the Shadows: Overreading L M Montgomery’s Novels through Her Journals” (1995).

² In a paper originally delivered in 1992, Rubio in her article “‘A Dusting Off’: An Anecdotal Account of Editing the L M Montgomery Journals” (2001) notes the difficulties she and Elizabeth Waterston—the other co-editor of the *Selected Journals*—faced in various stages of the editing process, the first being obtaining sufficient funding for the project. Rubio notes the patriarchal ideologies they faced when trying to get Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funding, being turned down on the basis that Montgomery was then considered a marginal writer, with academic treatment unworthy to be funded or studied as Montgomery (supposedly) only wrote for women and children, was a popular writer, lived in rural communities most of her life, and was a woman. After a difficult process of publishing the first volume of the *Selected Journals*, Rubio documents the radically different comments that assessors later made about the published journals: “with the publication of the first volume, Montgomery was suddenly and permanently recognized as a serious writer whose situation and responses merited academic re-evaluation and scrutiny” (qtd. in “‘A Dusting Off’” 61).

Rubio continued to challenge the conception that Montgomery’s works are unworthy of scholarly attention and/or that they do not have the potential of deeper meaning, among other places, in her Introduction to the edited collection of critical articles, *Harvesting Thistles: The Textual Garden of L M Montgomery* (1994).

L M Montgomery is a writer whose texts have been misread by those who see her solely as a children’s writer. Her early novels were written for a general audience, not for children. She was reviewed world-wide from 1908 onward as a writer of popular fiction—variously called ‘romances,’ ‘regional idylls,’ ‘domestic fiction,’ and sentimental stories.’ Her novels are far more complex than criticism has shown, and this collection suggests new critical strategies for reading her texts which, if they are sentimental gardens, also yield up a plentiful garden of thistles. (1)

living in idyllic Prince Edward Island were not prepared for the revelations Montgomery gave in her journals of a dissatisfied and unhappy life:³ “Thank God,” Montgomery wrote, “I can keep the shadows of my life out of my work. I would not wish to darken any other life—I want instead to be a messenger of optimism and sunshine” (*SJ* 1:339).⁴ “A first-time reader of Montgomery’s journals,” writes Janice Fiamengo in an article on the depression revealed in them (2005), “is likely to be struck, as Montgomery was, by the contrast between the sunshine of *Anne [of Green Gables]* and the ‘shadows’ of the life presented in the journals” (170).⁵ Indeed, while the journals can easily be seen as a “dark” contrast to Montgomery’s

See also the collection edited by Jean Mitchell entitled *Storm and Dissonance: L.M. Montgomery and Conflict* (2008) for a collection of more recent critical articles which explore the darker themes found in Montgomery’s fiction and life writing.

³ Rubio documents her own surprise at the journals’ contents in her anecdotal article “‘A Dusting Off.’” She notes that the former Dr. E. Stuart Macdonald, Montgomery’s son and her literary executor for forty years, had warned her that editing Montgomery’s diaries “would be a difficult task. He was not thinking that the editing itself might present problems [which also proved to be the case]; he merely thought that the public would be shocked at his mother’s diaries. . . . I thought he was overstating the case” (51).

In a review (1998) of the fourth volume of Montgomery’s *Selected Journals*, Carol Shields writes that even though she had not particularly enjoyed reading Montgomery’s most noted novel, *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), “it was a surprise to me when I opened Volume 1 of Lucy Maud Montgomery’s [journals] some years ago and encountered a wholly other voice” than what she had been accustomed to in the fiction (407). Despite this surprise, Shields claims that “Very few books in recent years have given me the depth of pleasure I’ve found in these . . . volumes of Lucy Maud Montgomery’s journals. . . . I know what the inside of another woman’s head looks like” (408).

⁴ See, however, *Among the Shadows: Tales from the Darker Side* (1990), nineteen short stories by L.M. Montgomery published in her lifetime, and later collected and edited into this volume by Rea Wilmshurst, for examples of Montgomery overtly allowing “shadows” to enter her fiction. Also see Montgomery’s recently posthumously published fiction *The Blythes are Quoted* (2009), edited by Benjamin Lefebvre, the final work by Montgomery and last of the “Anne” series, for a plethora of surprisingly “darker” material in her fiction.

⁵ Elizabeth Ballantyne professes that “To L.M. Montgomery, her journals were her ‘life book,’ the adult novel she was never able to write. Although undoubtedly happy with the creative outlet of her fiction, Montgomery yearned to record more substantial themes,” and quotes the journal entry in which Montgomery writes: “I want—oh, I want to write—something entirely different from anything I have written yet. . . . I want to write a book dealing with grown-up creatures—a psychological study of one human being’s life” (*SJ* 2:390). Ballantyne claims that “Her journals provide such a study” (403).

“light” fiction, scholars have also observed that elements of both the “light” and “dark” are present in Montgomery’s fiction and life writing.⁶

In her article “‘This has been a day in hell’: Montgomery, Popular Literature, Life Writing” (2002), Margaret Steffler theorizes that tension is “What holds our attention in both the novels and the journals . . .” (76). Critics often quote the entry in Montgomery’s journals in which she wrote, “I have a very uncomfortable blend in my make-up—the passionate Montgomery blood and the Puritan Macneill conscience. Neither is strong enough wholly to control the other” (*SJ* 1:213). Here is an example of Montgomery’s overtly drawing attention to the tension in her religious identity. Critics have analyzed this tension using varying approaches, abstractly considering that there were “two Montgomerys” (Hilder, “‘That Unholy Tendency to Laughter’” 35), a Montgomery who “lived between uneasy opposites” (E. K. Smith 4), and a Montgomery who was a “passionate young woman poured into the container of strict Presbyterianism” (Rubio, *Lucy Maud Montgomery: The Gift of Wings* 15).⁷ The first two quotations indeed suggest a tension between two evenly weighted and

⁶ See Margaret Steffler’s “‘This has been a day in hell’” for an interesting article arguing that “The reading of the novels and the journals, when viewed as a continuous process, connects girlhood and womanhood in a remarkable manner” for middle-aged women who read Montgomery’s novels as girls and her journals as women (73). Steffler argues, “The tension we sensed in the novels [as girls] but could never actually explain or understand was really there” (74), becoming apparent when Montgomery’s novels are read alongside her journals, the latter of which overtly speak of the adult problems that largely are covert in the fiction.

⁷ Presbyterianism refers to those Protestant churches that conform to the Calvinist reformed theological tradition, based on the writings of John Calvin (1509-1564) and governing themselves not by bishops or congregations but by representative assemblies called presbyteries. Presbyterianism originated primarily in Scotland under the influence of John Knox (1510-1572), who had lived with Calvin in Geneva and brought Calvin’s ideas to bear on the Scottish Reformation. Presbyterian theology emphasizes the authority of Scripture and the necessity of grace through faith in Christ, though individual churches interpret Presbyterian doctrine in widely different ways. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (2005), Presbyterianism’s ecclesiastical polity was understood by its original proponents not “as an innovation but as a rediscovery of the apostolic model found in the N[ew] T[estament]” (“Presbyterianism” 1331).

For a more detailed synopsis of Presbyterianism, see D. G. Hart and Mark A. Noll’s Introduction in *Dictionary of the Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition in America* (1999), or, for a full-length study of the religion in Canada, John S. Moir’s *Enduring Witness: A History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (1974). J.G. Stackhouse claims the religion to have “Once [been] the largest Protestant denomination in Canada . . .” (200).

competing forces. In this last quotation, however, Rubio uses language that does not merely indicate competing forces; rather, she implies that the “passionate” part of Montgomery was authentic while the religious “container” into which she had been poured was a construct; that is, that her religion contained, restricted, and limited her fluid and “passionate” self. While it may be tempting to regard Montgomery’s “passion” and her “Puritanism” as a strict dichotomy between her authentic personality and imposed religion, this dichotomy fails to acknowledge the nuances in Montgomery’s complex religious self-identity as expressed in her journals. Like the light/dark dichotomy between the journals and the fiction, the misleading dichotomy of organized religion versus spirituality must also be collapsed before a new understanding of Montgomery’s religious identity can be built upon it.

In her M.A. thesis “Passionate Blood, Puritan Conscience: An Intertextual Study of the Private and Public Works of L.M. Montgomery” (1998), Mary-Margaret Klempa makes a case for the confounding of oppositions:

The stark contrast between the journals and fiction reveals a conflict of identities of which Montgomery was well aware. She accounted for this conflict by referring to her ‘passionate Montgomery blood and [her] Puritan MacNeill [sic] conscience’ (Apr. 8, 1898 [*SJ* 1:213]). It may seem that the journals reflect the ‘passionate Montgomery blood,’ while the fiction reflects the ‘Puritan MacNeill [sic] conscience.’ However, such neat divisions cannot be made. Montgomery’s passion, or unconventionalism, is often revealed in her fiction Likewise, her puritanism, or conventionalism, is exposed in her journals. (2-3)

Tension is certainly present in the negotiation between Montgomery's religious identity as a Presbyterian and her religious identity as a spiritual person⁸ who held beliefs that were outside of and opposed to orthodox Presbyterian belief. As can be inferred from Klempa's argument, however, Montgomery's Presbyterian background is not simply a "container" into which her authentic, "passionate" self has been or can be poured. In Montgomery's own words, her passion and Puritanism are in fact a "*blend* in [her] make-up," not a dichotomy. This "blend" in Montgomery—or the nuanced relationship between the two seemingly opposing forces in her religious identity—will be negotiated in this thesis.

Lucy Maud Montgomery (1874-1942) was raised in the Presbyterian Church and there remained for the rest of her life. As a youth she attended church services and prayer meetings regularly; she taught Sunday school and was the organist for the church choir. In her mid-thirties she married Ewan Macdonald, a Presbyterian minister, and faithfully performed the many duties of a minister's wife almost up until the time of her death. Despite her outward display of religiosity, in her journals Montgomery questioned her Presbyterian religion for most of her life and self-consciously held beliefs that were outside of the realm of acceptable Presbyterianism. She went on to develop a "working belief" (*SJ* 1:197) which

⁸ As Philip Sheldrake explains in his chapter "What is Spirituality?" (1995), "our basic understanding of what is 'spiritual' and what is 'the Christian life' depends, in part at least, on particular experiences rather than merely on a theological language given for all time" (41). Accordingly, it must be noted that I use the words "spiritual" and "spirituality" throughout this thesis to mean something perhaps slightly different than the various contemporary, popular denotations. While the understanding I will use includes what can be seen as a more metaphorical definition of spirituality as, "The quality or condition of being spiritual; attachment to or regard for things of the spirit as opposed to material or worldly interests" (*OED* "Spirituality" Def. 3), I will also, in part, consider the definition of spirituality to include, "The fact or condition of being spirit or of consisting of an incorporeal essence" (*OED* "Spirituality" Def. 6) - with the word "essence" being the word of emphasis. That is, that the spirit is part of the essence that makes up one's being and, as such, "spirituality" is not merely a product of lived experience but is rather—or includes—an *a priori* condition. For the purposes of my argument in this thesis, I consciously assume that one has a spirit/one is born with a spirit. Just as many feminists assume that there is no essential gendered self (without being able to prove the assumption), I deliberately theorize that there is an essential spiritual self. If spirit is part of one's essence, and if religious or spiritual truth is recognized by the spirit, then one's spirit and spirituality will be the part of one's essence involved in discerning such truth.

was apparently quite heterodox to Presbyterianism and, at times, to Christianity in general, though some scholars have argued a case for her orthodoxy.⁹ In consideration of Montgomery's own overt expressions of disbelief, however, it is curious that she remained an active member of her church and preserved such a strong loyalty towards and affection for Presbyterianism. Indeed, the contrast between the religious affections and duties that Montgomery performed throughout her life and her private religious convictions was intense. In the journal entry in which she announced her engagement to her future husband, she theorized that a minister's wife "who had any independence in belief or character, must either be a failure . . . , or must cloak her real self under an assumed orthodoxy" (*SJ* 1:321). As a woman who possessed independence in both belief and character, Montgomery shielded her questioning of traditional beliefs and her embrace of unorthodox religious convictions from the public eye, though she wrote of these beliefs and convictions in her journals.¹⁰

Besides the normal social considerations that would have prevented someone in a rural, predominantly Presbyterian, tightly-knit community from questioning religion, or voicing unorthodox beliefs, Montgomery additionally held numerous roles of authority and guidance, both publicly and privately, in her middle and later life. Being both a minister's wife and a best-selling author of wholesome books with young heroines put her in a delicate position, in which there was ample reason to keep her doubts and unorthodoxy hidden. She

⁹ See for example Gavin White and Monika B. Hilder's articles, respectively: "The Religious Life of L.M. Montgomery" (1994) and "'That Unholy Tendency to Laughter': L.M. Montgomery's Iconoclastic Affirmation of Faith in *Anne of Green Gables*" (2004), both of which will be discussed later in this thesis.

¹⁰ The observant reader may notice that I silently switch back and forth between past and present tense in reference to Montgomery and her work. In this thesis I tend to refer to the historical figure of Montgomery in the past tense; however, in specific reference to passages from her works—especially when performing close readings which illuminate her self-constructions—I adopt the conventional literary present tense.

had but a few close friends and correspondents in whom she could confide, and as even her husband was not one with whom she could share her doubts,¹¹ she often turned to her journals to reveal her “inner thoughts” (Rubio, *Gift of Wings* 6), especially on matters of belief and doubt.¹²

This thesis considers Montgomery’s religious identity—as recorded in her *Selected Journals*—as a Presbyterian and as a spiritual person. It begins by considering existing life writing or autobiography theory as a means of applying new ideas of religious identity and self-construction to Montgomery’s journals (as a current model for studying religion in modern autobiography does not, as far as I know, exist). It considers the ways in which Montgomery’s religious identity was in fact a self-construction both in her relationship to Presbyterianism and in her expressions and experiences of belief and doubt. In particular, separate chapters focus on the ways in which Montgomery constructed her “self”¹³ in her journals as “unorthodox,” as Presbyterian, and as a seeker of truth. In conclusion, reflections on religion in life writing in general are drawn insofar as they relate to this study of Montgomery’s journals. As in autobiography theories centred on gender, I argue that Montgomery’s *religious* self-identity involved a tension—though not dichotomy—between a

¹¹ In the Introduction to the second volume of the *Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery*, the editors note that “Once Maud remarked sadly that the only subject on which [Ewan] talked well was theology [SJ 1:321]; and since she held rather heterodox views on religion, she did not encourage this topic of conversation” (2:xiii).

¹² In her biography on Montgomery, *The Gift of Wings*, Rubio maintains, “[a]s a minister’s wife with a very judgemental nature, [Montgomery] developed a carefully controlled public persona and revealed little of her inner thoughts. Her journals were clearly a safety valve for a highly volatile woman” (6).

¹³ In this thesis I use “self,” occasionally in quotation marks for emphasis, to indicate self-construction. If merely referring to Montgomery (not in relation to her self-constructions), I use the familiar pronoun *herself* in contradistinction to the noun which indicates her (constructed) self.

social construct and her essence, a tension which was not in a purely antagonistic relationship, but in a nuanced and rich one.¹⁴

The first chapter of this thesis situates Montgomery's journals in existing life writing and autobiography scholarship. I emphasize the concern with the construction of the "self" in autobiography theory and demonstrate that currently, though there are theories in autobiography to analyze Montgomery's self-construction in terms of her gender and her occupation as a published writer (a position that would make her acutely aware of her audience, for which she would construct herself accordingly), there is a lack in the area of *religion* as an important consideration for identity. I also uncover the rich history of the generically religious roots of the autobiography and the diary as an additional reason for studying Montgomery's *Selected Journals* as a modern text with religious elements. An overview of the ways in which Montgomery's religiosity has been viewed by biographers is also given. Using these theories and backgrounds as implicit guides, the second to fourth chapters then approach Montgomery's journals using the underlying perspective of social constructionism in exploring the complex religious identity of the self portrayed in Montgomery's journals.

After a brief overview of previous scholars' analyses of Montgomery's religious tension, chapter two then examines the ways in which Montgomery diverged from conventional spiritual autobiographies and conversion narratives and constructed her "self" in her journals as being "unorthodox." Different literary techniques that Montgomery used to accomplish this, especially comparison and contrast of her current beliefs with beliefs of others, are highlighted. I argue that Montgomery's "unorthodoxy" tended to exist within a

¹⁴ Although the church will primarily be seen as the "social" and her personal spirituality as the "essential," it must be noted that the fact that Montgomery identified herself as "Presbyterian" though constructed her "self" as "unorthodox" is not a strict divide between the social and the essential.

limited framework of a community-based understanding of the term, and that while she seemed to have held some legitimately unorthodox views, her identity in being “unorthodox” was more indicative of a self-construction than a quantifiable reality.

Chapter three discusses the ways in which Montgomery constructed her “self” as having a strong identity as a Presbyterian. First considering her largely assumed identity as a Presbyterian minister’s wife, I then ground the discussion by presenting a clear indication of Montgomery’s authentic Presbyterian identity: her strong reaction against Church Union in 1925. The ways in which Montgomery’s Presbyterian identity was manifest in her journals quietly through daily experiences and observations are also explored, and I argue that along with personal experience, her identity as a Presbyterian was informed by societal/cultural norms and familial ideals.

Chapter four explores the ways in which Montgomery constructed her “self” as being a seeker of truth. I explore the ways in which Montgomery presented her method of arriving at truth as intellectually honest, rather than as a way based on emotions or traditions. I also consider the ways in which she elevated the quest for truth even over “orthodoxy” and Presbyterianism, and how this privileging may very well have been calculated to give Montgomery credibility in the eyes of future readers. I also present an interpretation in which Montgomery’s *Selected Journals* can in fact be seen to act as a type of modern spiritual autobiography in a religiously doubting world (an idea that is further addressed in the conclusion).

In the conclusion, I offer reflections on examining religion within modern life writing. As noted, working theories for considering religion in modern autobiography have yet to be sufficiently developed. This study uses current autobiography theory to analyze the

religious dimension in Montgomery's life writing—a consideration that is not always taken into account or fully realized in a post-Christian society, and is seldom understood in-depth. I argue that both the *social* part of her religious identity, as well as the *essential*, are evoked in Montgomery's process of seeking truth, and that the model based on an autobiography theory of gender is insufficient when applied to religious identity. The difficulty in assessing Montgomery's complex religious self-identity in her journals is considered in the larger context of the difficulty of assessing, in general, modern life writing that contains important religious self-constructions but which is not generically "religious."

It is my intent that this thesis sufficiently demonstrates the need for a theory of religion which can be applied to modern autobiographies, and it is my hope that my analysis may serve as preliminary groundwork to aid in furthering a deeper realization and development of such a theory.

CHAPTER 1

“on religion . . . , Montgomery has nothing new to say”:

LIFE WRITING THEORY, RELIGIOUS IDENTITY,
AND CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE SELF

Before the posthumous publication of the five volumes of *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery* (SJ 1985, 1987, 1992, 1998, 2004), there seemed little reason to doubt Montgomery’s devotion to religion in either her practice or belief. Also known as Mrs. Ewan Macdonald—wife of the small-town Ontario Presbyterian minister—L.M. Montgomery, the famous author of girls’ novels celebrating her beloved island, had ample reason to be regarded as staunchly and proudly Presbyterian. Along with performing the many duties of a minister’s wife almost up until the time of her death, Montgomery appeared to uphold the ideals of Christianity in her novels. In her autobiography (published serially in 1917 in Toronto’s *Everywoman’s World* magazine and reprinted as *The Alpine Path: The Story of My Career* in 1975), Montgomery did not indicate a divergence from the religious belief in which she was raised, but rather suggested the continuation of the tradition when she wrote “We were Presbyterians, and went every Sunday to the old Cavendish [PEI] Presbyterian Church . . .” (45); in this account she said little about her duties as a minister’s wife (the account was overtly focused on her career as a successful, world-famous author); however, near the end she did indicate that “As my husband was pastor of an Ontario congregation, I had now to leave Prince Edward Island and move to Ontario” (95). The statement leaves the reader to infer that her particular religious beliefs and practices were what might be expected of a minister’s wife.

Biographies and other accounts/recollections of Montgomery's life likewise depicted or assumed (even by silence) her devotion in her religion, as well as her devotion to her role as a minister's wife. Hilda M. Ridley in *The Story of L.M. Montgomery* (1956) states that "The Macneills were good Presbyterians," implying that Montgomery had been raised and remained one too, reading only "religious books on the Sabbath" (58), later "[taking] up the serious task of being a minister's wife" (108), and "[giving] some of her best efforts to church and community projects" (126); in the pamphlet-style-book *Lucy Maud Montgomery: "The Island's Lady of Stories"* by The Women's Institute, Springfield, Prince Edward Island (1963), nothing of Montgomery's Presbyterian upbringing is mentioned, though it does note her marriage "to Rev. Ewan MacDonald [sic]. . . a former minister of the Presbyterian congregation at Cavendish," her subsequent "twenty-four years [as] . . . the busy wife of a busy clergyman . . ." (9) and (they claim) her "devot[ion] to her home and to all the associations which that word invokes" (10); and, she was warmly remembered by Margaret H. Mustard, a member of her husband's congregation, in *L.M. Montgomery as Mrs. Ewan Macdonald of the Leaskdale Manse 1911-1926* (1965) as a woman who was "thoroughly initiated as a minister's wife. . . and approached her duties as a minister's wife with dignity and dedication" (4). In these biographies, which predated the publication of Montgomery's *Selected Journals*, Montgomery was represented as orthodox and devout in her personal beliefs and dedication to the church.¹

¹ It was with Francis W.P. Bolger's book *The Years Before "Anne"* (1974) and Mollie Gillen's *The Wheel of Things: A Biography of Lucy Maud Montgomery* (1975) that some of Montgomery's devotion to her religion beliefs and enjoyment of her religious duties were depicted as lacking. "Despite her reservations about the tenets of her Presbyterian faith," writes Bolger, "[Montgomery] never faltered in her outward adherence to its forms and practices" (178); he later stated that "While there is considerable evidence to suggest that she did not particularly enjoy many of the tedious responsibilities associated with her role as wife of a minister in a small community, she religiously fulfilled her obligations" (203). Bolger further explains that "Not until her journals and private correspondence were made public was it realized how utterly taxing and meaningless many of these religious duties were to the basically untraditional and emphatically unorthodox Lucy Maud Montgomery"

Then came the revelation with the publication of her journals. Within them, among other things, Montgomery criticized ministers, resented the work she did as a minister's wife as well as the people she served, and questioned doctrines of the Presbyterian church.² The publication of the journals dramatically changed the ways in which biographers treated her religious observance, faith, and performance of duties as a minister's wife.³ Yet even after the publication of Montgomery's journals, in which her "true" religious beliefs and resentment towards her work as a minister's wife were revealed, some biographers continued to depict her as orthodox and/or devout in duty, such as in Alexandra Heilbron's work, *Remembering Lucy Maud Montgomery* (2001), a collection of memories by those who knew Montgomery.⁴

(203). Rubio indicates the negative reader response caused by "Mollie Gillen's 1975 biography which had angered many people in Leaskdale and Norval [two communities in which Montgomery's husband had been minister]. It was Gillen who had first suggested that Montgomery had found some of her husband's parishioners boring, boorish and unlovable" ("A Dusting Off" 68).

² In her Introduction to *The Intimate Life of L.M. Montgomery*, Irene Gammel notes, "the posthumous publication of the journals has had the effect of the proverbial bombshell. Readers were shocked to learn that their beloved Montgomery had never loved her husband, had hated her social duties as minister's wife, and in fact, had scorned many of the people who thought she was their friend" (4).

³ A work of collected letters which was published prior to the *Selected Journals* and suggested Montgomery's questioning of conventional belief was *The Green Gables Letters from L.M. Montgomery to Ephraim Weber, 1905-1909* (1960), edited by Wilfrid Eggleston. Included in this collection are letters in which she overtly rejects Christ's divinity (June 28, 1905) and the Christian heaven (April 8, 1906). Despite its earlier publication, after this work appeared Montgomery was still largely seen as being religiously conventional until the time in which the *Selected Journals* were published, at which point public opinion tended to adopt another opinion.

⁴ To reconcile this discrepancy of identities, Rubio indicates that the person whom people knew as L.M. Montgomery indeed *was* that person, and that the journals revealed only another version of her "self." Rubio notes,

It is worth observing that the Mrs. Macdonald/L.M. Montgomery who affected people's lives was the person they *thought* her to be. For instance, if a young woman in the community admired L.M. Montgomery/Mrs. Ewan Macdonald and modeled her behaviour on this refined and kindly minister's wife, how can we say that this gracious role model was not the *real* Maud, at least in how she affected people, for most of the time? Yet, the tortured Maud who wrote the journals was clearly the *real* Maud another part of the time. ("A Dusting Off" 65-66)

Largely, however, biographers and scholars alike noted Montgomery's religiously heterodox positions and resentment as expressed in her life writing.⁵ More recent examples include Jane Urquhart's *L.M. Montgomery* (2009) and Rubio's *Lucy Maud Montgomery: The Gift of Wings* (2008), the latter of which overtly and emphatically depicts Montgomery's divergence from Presbyterianism and emphasizes her religious doubt.⁶ Additionally, *The Lucy Maud Montgomery Album* (1999)—which is not a biography strictly but a series of essays about Montgomery's life—has an opening article entitled “Lucy Maud Montgomery: Passionate Puritan” in which Edith Katherine Smith claims that “[Montgomery's] journals offer dark portraits of Presbyterianism and despairing visions of a faith cherished but frankly disbelieved” (3), overtly drawing attention to Montgomery's religious scepticism.

In general, the journals' publication changed the ways in which scholars regarded Montgomery's religiosity. A number of scholars have looked at religion as portrayed in

⁵ In her Introduction to *Remembering Lucy Maud Montgomery*, Heilbron does acknowledge that “when her journals were published, a darker side of L.M. Montgomery emerged” (13) and that “only certain aspects of her personality are portrayed in her books and journals” (14). Nonetheless, she claims that “Only when we take in *all* the information—her novels, her journals, and the memories of the people who knew her—do we have as true a picture as possible of the real L.M. Montgomery. This book offers one more aspect, one more piece of the puzzle that was Maud. The following shows how she appeared to the people who knew her—the fans, friends, maids, Sunday school students, and family members” (14-15).

⁶ In *The Gift of Wings*, for instance, Rubio writes concerning doubt and belief that “Maud felt much quiet scepticism over religion—she saw it as a social institution more than a religious one—but she retained a deep-seated reverence for the idea of God” (188); that “Maud's faith was increasingly tortured [at the time of World War I]: although she believed in the concept of sacrifice, she found it hard to believe that this was God's plan for these young men” (192); that “In her journals, she expressed growing frustration with a world that did not reward noble thoughts and good deeds. . . . She accepted religion's loss of authority, but she was unwilling to relinquish her own belief that justice and goodness should prevail” (204); that “She had lost her unquestioning belief in all the tenets of her ancestors' stern Presbyterian religion” (269); that “By 1924, she stated that she believed that all events were governed by the Darwinian concept of ‘blind impersonal Chance,’ not by a deity. Her doubts about the role that God and religion played in human affairs were already beginning to show . . . in the first eight months of 1920” (285); and that “She had started to see religion more as a social organization than anything else, and she thought that the real power lay in science and knowledge, not in a literal and omnipotent God sitting on high” (286).

Though Urquhart does not stress Montgomery's unorthodoxy as emphatically as Rubio does, she still notes Montgomery's deviance from traditional beliefs and tension in performing religious duties. Urquhart writes that Montgomery subscribed to “a variety of pantheism” (82), felt isolated as a minister's wife (74), and hid from her husband's congregation that he suffered from a mental condition, in which he was convinced that he was eternally damned (114).

Montgomery's novels and compared it with the religious references in her journals; much like the light/dark revelation that came with the publication of the journals, the darker religious connotations found in the journals were now detected in the fiction as the fiction was compared with the journals and re-evaluated. Often, in these studies, Montgomery's journals have been used to clarify or highlight religious thought (and doubt) in the novels.⁷ In her Introduction to *The Annotated Anne of Green Gables* (1997), Margaret Anne Doody states that, "[o]ne of the most subtle and serious games Montgomery is playing [in her fiction] has to do with religion" (22). Rubio illustrates in her article "L.M. Montgomery: Scottish-Presbyterian Agency in Canadian Culture" (1999) that Montgomery uses religious satire throughout her novels (94-97). Another critic, Rosemary Ross Johnston, argues that Montgomery's "religious impulse" provides an overall "structural coherence" to the novels (7). These and other critics recognize the importance—if not centrality—of religion in Montgomery's fiction.

Such attention, however, has not been given to Montgomery's life writing. Doody claims that "[w]hen Montgomery gives direct expression to religious doubt or belief, as in her letters to Ephraim Weber,⁸ however daring these expressions may have seemed to her, she is merely adopting the most fashionable forms of unbelief in the Victorian age" (23). Similarly, Gavin White in his article, "The Religious Thought of L.M. Montgomery" (1994), posits that Montgomery "had a religious faith not unusual to her time and place," and that

⁷ Examples of this tendency will be given in chapter two.

⁸ Published as *The Green Gables Letters* (see footnote number three of this chapter). Some of Montgomery's "daring" expressions of religious doubt and belief found in these letters are given in footnote three of this chapter. After Doody's Introduction was written, another selection of letters was later published as *After Green Gables L M Montgomery's Letters to Ephraim Weber, 1916-1941* (2006), edited by Hildi Frosese Tiessen and Paul Gerard Tiessen. There is also a selection of letters which Montgomery wrote to another correspondent, G.B. MacMillan, in which Montgomery also discusses religious topics, published in *My Dear Mr M Letters to G B MacMillan from L M Montgomery* (1990), edited by Francis P. Bolger and Elizabeth R. Epperly.

though she worked out theological problems on her own, “we should not think her to have been some sort of religious genius just because she managed to do this” (87). Both Doody and White appear to be of the opinion that Montgomery was not extraordinary in developing the theological beliefs which she recorded in her letters and journals. They implicitly disregard the need for a thorough investigation of Montgomery’s beliefs, seeing such beliefs merely as a reflection of the beliefs and doubts shared by many of Montgomery’s Victorian and modernist predecessors and contemporaries. Doody maintains, “[w]hen she writes like an essayist on religion and the unorthodox [i.e. in her life writing], Montgomery has nothing new to say; in her fiction she does something more interesting” (23), again directing attention back to Montgomery’s fiction.

When religion has been considered in the journals, expressions of belief and doubt have largely been seen as a genuine, biographically uncomplicated context for the fiction, rather than being viewed with suspicion or as an aspect of Montgomery’s complex self-construction. This study proposes to analyze Montgomery’s expression of religious identity in the journals using the tools and perspective of life writing theory. The purpose is not to judge or authenticate her expressions of religious belief and doubt; nor do I take for granted that Montgomery’s statements in her journals are in any simple sense historically true. Rather, the purpose will be to reveal and analyze the manifestation of self-construction in Montgomery’s journals, with the focus on how Montgomery expressed religious identity and used such expressions to shape her religious self-construction in the pages of her journals.

When studying life writing—especially by an accomplished creative writer—in any of the subgenres, there are temptations of comparison and contrast that both the critic and the average reader face. Two of these temptations when looking at religious expression are, one,

to unduly compare/contrast the life writing with the writer's fictional oeuvre in order to seek the writer's true or core religious beliefs,⁹ and, two, to collapse different pieces of life writing together, seeing them as a seamless and unified single text.¹⁰ While comparisons between an author's life writing and fiction¹¹ or between different pieces of life writing¹² may very well prove fruitful and rich in analysis, these comparisons will be severely limited if the third temptation is not guarded against: the more subtle and difficult temptation of supposing that the persona found in the autobiographical work authentically represents the person who created it.

⁹ Accordingly, Montgomery's *Selected Journals* will not be used in this thesis to clarify religious passages written in her fiction, nor will they be used as a comparison/contrast to the religious views found in her fiction or as a comparison/contrast to the methods through which she expressed either.

¹⁰ In Hilder's article on religion in *Anne of Green Gables*, for example, she claims that "In her published journals and correspondence, Montgomery frequently rejects central tenets of the Christian faith" (36). Though Hilder identifies using both the published letters and journals—implicitly regarding them as separate texts—she uses concrete examples or support of Montgomery's rejection of Christianity predominantly found in the published letters to support this claim. Furthermore, in a more recent article by Hilder entitled "Imagining the Ultimate Kindred Spirit: The Feminist Theological Vision of L.M. Montgomery" (2008), she again claims that Montgomery "frequently rejected major tenets of the Christian faith, such as the divinity of Christ, the doctrine of atonement and the doctrine of hell," yet instead of quoting both the journals and letters for this specific claim, she references the letters here exclusively for support, though she cites the journals to document—more generally—Montgomery's "growing doubt" (309). In both articles, Hilder fails to overtly acknowledge her uneven referencing of Montgomery's letters and journals to support her claim of Montgomery's "frequent reject[ion]" of central/major "tenets of the Christian faith" ("That Unholy Tendency to Laughter" 36 and "Imagining the Ultimate Kindred Spirit" 309). Hilder's predominant use of examples from the letters begs the question as to whether Montgomery more pronouncedly portrayed her rejection of Christianity in her letters than in her journals.

¹¹ Rubio argues that Montgomery wrote of religion in both her journals and her fiction, though she was more overt and critical about it in her journals, while more gently satiric in her fiction ("L.M. Montgomery . . ." 94-97).

¹² The letters that Montgomery wrote to G.B. MacMillan and Ephraim Weber, selections of which were published posthumously, admittedly often contain reflections on religious issues. Although a comparison of religion in the letters to the journals would prove to be an interesting study in itself, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider adequately. Montgomery herself overtly acknowledges this overlap as she explained to MacMillan her systematic practice of her letter writing: "I shall open my correspondence notebook, ascertain the date of my last letter to you, open my journal at that date and proceed to tell you any bit of news or philosophy or fun that may turn up in proper sequence" (*My Dear Mr. M.* 147-48). The editors of *After Green Gables*, Tiessen and Tiessen, warn in "A Note on the Text" that though there are "echoes among different texts" of Montgomery's life writing, "[a]ny overlaps that do occur, like the myriad differences, invite investigation of the many new meanings that emerge through attention to similarities between texts or gaps in one text or the other" (55).

Before considering this last point, a classification of what constitutes “life writing” in Montgomery’s canon will be given, as well as a note about the text to be used for this thesis. First, life writing includes Montgomery’s journals, letters, scrapbooks, and autobiography. The canon of Montgomery’s life writing extends to portions of her journals not selected for publication (found in handwritten ledgers and a condensed typescript housed in the University of Guelph archives); her letters, both published and unpublished¹³; her autobiography (*The Alpine Path*); and arguably her more ephemeral scrapbooks (unpublished, as well as Elizabeth Epperly’s published collection *Imagining Anne: The Island Scrapbooks of L.M. Montgomery*) and photographs.¹⁴ This thesis, however, will be concerned primarily with (arguably) one text (though Rubio argued each published volume to be a separate text in “‘A Dusting Off’”): the five published volumes of *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery*.¹⁵

While it has many benefits, this text’s limitations will here be overtly acknowledged; the limitations stem primarily from the multi-person shaping that the *published* text has undergone. The shaping of Montgomery’s *Selected Journals* is one not controlled entirely by Montgomery, but was also influenced by the wishes of Dr. E. Stuart Macdonald, Montgomery’s son and literary executor; fashioned by the editors, Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston, who chose the copy text;¹⁶ further influenced by the publisher, who required a

¹³ See footnote number nine earlier in this chapter for a list of Montgomery’s published letters.

¹⁴ See Epperly’s *Through Lover’s Lane L M Montgomery’s Photography and Visual Imagination* as well as Higgins’s “Snapshot Portraits,” an article on the photographs that Montgomery inserted in her journals.

¹⁵ Carol Shields explains that Montgomery “began her ‘life-book,’ as she called [her journals], at the age of 14 and continued all her life, pouring out her private thoughts, two million words in all . . .” (408).

¹⁶ Along with burning the diary which she had begun when she was “a tot of nine” (*SJ* 1:1), Montgomery also evidently destroyed or lost the original “diaries” which she had begun when fourteen years of age. Rubio states that Montgomery’s diaries were “carefully copied into large financial ledgers after she had become world

significantly condensed version of the complete journals for publication;¹⁷ and by a combination of choices from both the editors and publisher, who were responsible for selecting which entries or partial entries would be included or omitted to create both a good read and a manageable print length. Due to this reality, this thesis will necessarily regard the shaping of the *Selected Journals* as a cooperation/collaboration between Montgomery, her literary executor, the editors, and publisher. Indeed, John Sturrock has made the claim that reducing an autobiographical text, such as by giving a summary of it, is already theorizing it; the same may be argued for making selections of a text:

It could be argued that even to give a précis of an autobiography, to retell it as a story of one's own, is tacitly to theorize it, since *however we choose to reduce a text* we do so according to some set of rules or choices, so that a collection of potted autobiographies produced by a single author is sure to reveal a consistency of method amounting to a potential theory of the genre.

(22-23, emphasis added)

famous" ("A Dusting Off" 55), which would become the basis of the copy text for the *Selected Journals*. Yet Rubio also notes that "Because Montgomery had disposed of the original diaries from which she prepared her final handwritten diaries/journals, we could not compare the contents of these two versions of her life story. She tells us that she changed nothing in the recopying, but we came to regard this statement with some scepticism, for she clearly did sometimes editorialize when she started nearing the end of her ledger" (*ibid* 59). Although a comparison of these two documents was not and is not possible, the selection of a copy text still was a choice for the editors as Montgomery had made an additional, typewritten copy of her journals. As part of a note appearing at the beginning of Volume II of the *Selected Journals*, implicitly it is Rubio and Waterston who state that along with the handwritten journals and other papers that Dr. Macdonald had provided to Guelph was also "a much abridged version of them [of Montgomery's handwritten journals] which she had typed." In Volume III of the *Selected Journals* under "A Note on the Text," Rubio and Waterston acknowledge that they used the typewritten text as a comparison to the handwritten copy text (xxiv).

¹⁷ Rubio notes that all the publishers whom she and Dr. Macdonald had approached with the proposition of publishing Montgomery's diaries—not solely Oxford who eventually published them—had indicated that a significant amount of material must first be cut in order for the journals to be publishable: "All had been adamant that only *selections* from the original diaries could be published. The sheer bulk of Montgomery's 'life-books'—ten volumes of five hundred pages each—daunted them all" ("A Dusting Off" 55).

The editors of the *Selected Journals* themselves have noted the difficulty with which they made selections for the published product.¹⁸ As it is beyond the scope of this project to reconsider the copy text used, consult the omitted or partial entries, or inspect the handwritten journals for accuracy compared with the published ones, this thesis—for the convenience of both writer and general readers—will use the standard of the *Selected Journals* for theorizing and quoting, being aware, however, that a preliminary theorizing has already been undertaken in a collaborative effort, especially by the editors in making the selections. Aside from convenience, another advantage in this choice is that the editors explicitly mention the religious content as an interesting consideration in the journals, which at least implies their attention to this topic when making selections and the inclusion of at least what they believe to be the most significant passages that deal overtly with religion.¹⁹ This thesis is conscious that the published journals represent only a selection; not only did Montgomery craft this work, but her editors did as well by making selections.²⁰ Since the journals exist as a scholarly edition, carefully selected and annotated following standard editorial practice, it is sufficient for the purposes of this thesis. It is also the only available published version.

¹⁸ Rubio notes in recounting the editing process, “To think of condensing the diaries was a daunting prospect, for Montgomery had written them in a narrative style that did not lend itself to condensation . . . [W]e could not bear to remove anything. But we knew we had to cut, or the diaries would not be published at all” (“A Dusting Off” 55, 56).

¹⁹ In the Introduction to Volume III of the *Selected Journals*, Rubio and Waterston identify “theological” concerns as one of the many interesting aspects of the journals (xxiv), and further state in “A Note on the Text” in that volume that they had provided notes on different aspects of the content in the journals—including theology—to situate the journals within their proper context (xxv).

²⁰ Indeed, in a long footnote, Rubio overtly acknowledges and in fact eloquently argues that the belaboured work of an editor is in fact a shaping and artistry, particularly the editing that went into shaping the volumes of the *Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery* (“A Dusting Off” 75-77).

Determining the genre of the *Selected Journals* is a complicated matter and has interpretative implications for the text. In life writing theory, autobiography has tended to be a more respected genre than that of journals or diaries because of its status as a literary, crafted work. Until recently, journals and diaries were regarded as possessing little, if any, literary structure and/or technique, largely due to their supposed spontaneity. The diaries and journals of women had especially been largely excluded from literary consideration.²¹

Elizabeth Podnieks explains that “Women’s writings have often been devalued in light of men’s Women’s diaries in particular have suffered the fate of being gendered ‘feminine’ and thus of less historical, cultural, and literary value than ‘masculine’ works” (50). Critics such as Judy Nolt Lesink have argued that diaries in fact do possess literary structuring, have literary merit, and ought to be included in discussions of life writing, and implicitly of literature as a whole. Critics have particularly argued for the diaries and journals of literary women as having structure that would lend these works to literary consideration.²² The same argument can and has been made regarding the journals of such a prolific writer as Montgomery: this literary woman’s journals, too, reveal structure and technique that allow for a fruitful study of them as literary works.

In a relatively early analysis of Montgomery’s journals, Margaret E. Turner claimed,

²¹ In her Introduction to *The Intimate Life of L M Montgomery*, Irene Gammel notes, “Women have traditionally written in the personal forms of letters and diaries, but only recently has this writing been accepted as writing. ‘This diary writing does not really count as writing,’ wrote Virginia Woolf on 20 January 1919 in her diary, while Anaïs Nin also laboured to find acceptance for her diaries within the literary genre. It has taken the past two decades [Gammel’s Introduction being written in 2005] for scholars to document that life writing is not a passive mirroring of self, but a forum for self-invention and self-discovery, for the articulation of female agency, and for both resisting and re-inscribing social conventions” (4).

²² See for instance a discussion of women’s literary diaries and journals in two full-length studies: Podnieks’s *Daily Modernism: The Literary Diaries of Virginia Woolf, Antonia White, Elizabeth Smart, and Anais Nin* (2000) and Judy Simons’s *Diaries and Journals of Literary Women from Fanny Burney to Virginia Woolf* (1990).

[Montgomery's] journals cannot be understood or read, as women's diaries have sometimes been, as spontaneous, immediate, and simple notations of daily life and domestic detail, nor even as an informal and discontinuous form of lifewriting which until recently was devalued in favour of 'real' (i.e. male) autobiography written about 'important' (i.e. public) lives. (94)²³

Turner claims that Montgomery's "journalizing is a specific literary act" (94). She demonstrates this by showing that Montgomery rewrote and edited her journals, a practice which is in line with Podnieks's conclusions regarding the literary diaries of select women writers: "with their heightened consciousness of literary form, [they] are more aware of the aesthetic possibilities of the diary" (5).²⁴ Similarly, in her Introduction to *The Intimate Life of L.M. Montgomery* (2004), a collection of articles on the life writing of the famous author, Irene Gammel notes that "Montgomery shaped her life writing . . . as a self-consciously literary and artistic genre . . ." (4). In articles and Introductions, Rubio and Waterston have duly noted Montgomery's self-conscious "shaping" of her diaries, both in the narrative threads she wove throughout them (*Writing a Life* 11-13) and in the very process of her recopying her small diaries into the legal-sized ledgers,²⁵ suggesting a consciousness that she was indeed performing a literary act and crafting or shaping a life story. Indeed, in her article "A Dusting Off," Rubio notes the difficulty with which she and Waterston pruned down

²³ See Jane Marcus's article "Invincible Mediocrity: the Privates Selves of Public Women" (1988).

²⁴ Indeed, Podnieks also concedes that "even non-literary diarists practise similar controlling strategies" (5).

²⁵ In the Introduction to Volume III of the *Selected Journals*, Rubio and Waterston note that Montgomery copied the "small, non-uniform diaries dating from the 1890s . . . into legal-sized ledgers," beginning in the winter of 1918-19 (xix); elsewhere it has been speculated that Montgomery must have edited as she recopied the diaries. Rubio and Waterston also note that Montgomery "tinkered with the manuscript. In the record of her life, pages are carefully razored out and painstakingly replaced with substitute sheets on which she writes passages to replace those she considered not proper for eyes other than her own. Other passages are heavily inked over; still others are erased and over-written, probably at a time later than the first period of copying" (*ibid* xxiii).

the journals to make them publishable, a difficulty arising largely due to the fact that “Montgomery had written them in a narrative style that did not lend itself to condensation. . . . Her diaries, carefully copied into large financial ledgers after she had become world famous . . . were almost *seamless in their art*” (55, emphasis added).

Partly due to Montgomery’s method of writing and rewriting, editing, and censoring her “journals,” the appropriate classification of this document within life writing has been questioned and explored. Rubio notes that “Montgomery’s composition process” of her “journals” included “jotting down materials for her diaries on handy scraps of paper and assembling these to write up later” (“‘A Dusting Off’” 69). Additionally, in an endnote, Rubio explains, speaking personally, that “I usually refer to the ten unpublished manuscripts as ‘diaries’ and to the published Oxford volumes as ‘journals,’ although I am not always consistent. Montgomery called them ‘diaries,’ but they are more properly called ‘journals’ since they are not a day-by-day unedited account of her life” (“‘A Dusting Off’” 74, nt2). Many scholars in fact do not differentiate between the diary and the journal, or they inconsistently refer to them; however, Felicity A. Nussbaum in her article “Toward Conceptualizing Diary” (1988), states that “I am using diary here to mean the daily recording of the thoughts, feelings, and activities of the writer, entered frequently and regularly; and I am using journal interchangeably, though often diaries are considered to be the less elaborate form” (130). While Nussbaum notes that there does seem to be an acknowledgement of the differentiation between diaries and journals, she essentially suspends it and uses the words synonymously. Nussbaum does, however, make the distinction between the two forms by stating that journals were used for long narrative

entries, while the diary tended to be more for jotted notes of activities or events.²⁶ There appears to be a general consensus among autobiography scholars that the two terms can generally be interchanged, but there is, at the same time, an acknowledgment that journals are (at least to some degree) superior to diaries in their literary construction.

Though the terms “diary” and “journal” may be collapsed in some cases to signify the same sort of document, Harriet Blodgett makes a clear distinction between diaries/journals and autobiographies, and identifies this difference largely in reference to authorial intent (or, at least, practice or result): “the diarist’s urge . . . is not the autobiographer’s,” she claims. “Where the autobiographer aims to reconstruct in a coherent self-valorizing work the self that once she was (or thinks she was), the diarist ordinarily seeks to retain a self in process as she currently sees it, unconcerned about whether the parts all fit or focus in one direction” (10),²⁷ a distinction that does not seem to apply well to Montgomery’s “journals.”

Montgomery’s journals have, to a certain extent at least, been accepted as a hybrid of diary, journal, and autobiography. Turner claims that Montgomery’s “journals” “invite us to question or refuse generic categorization, as women’s writing often does” (96). Similarly, in her Introduction to the genre of autobiography written by women in an earlier period, Sharon Cadman Seelig sees the need of “being aware of genre without engaging in rigid categorization” (11). Though referring specifically to the autobiographies of early modern women, the approach Seelig takes in considering their texts is also applicable to

²⁶ She gives an example of the differentiation: “John Wesley, for example, kept diaries that were little more than lists of activities he assigned to a precise hour, but he later expanded them into a more discursive narrative journal” (Nussbaum 130). It could be said that Montgomery did something similar to this, as Rubio notes in her article “‘A Dusting Off’” that Montgomery often jotted down ideas on scraps of paper before writing the entries up in her journals (69).

²⁷ Blodgett writes that “the diary’s essential property as a form is its more-or-less dailiness, so that a diarist cannot know how her book will proceed in the future” (2).

Montgomery's "journals": "I've found it less helpful to assign individual texts to a particular generic category than to use those categories to understand the contexts in which a text may be read" (7). This study will not pigeonhole Montgomery's journals as one subcategory of life writing, but will, instead, accept (as Turner and others have demonstrated) that her journals participate in various subgenres of life writing in different ways.

As stated earlier, the persona of Montgomery in her journals is not synonymous with Montgomery the person; expressions in the journals cannot necessarily be seen as absolutely accurate, complete, and unmediated portrayals of the woman, though Rubio admits the difficulty—she said it was “impossible”—to “separate the living woman who purported to write the diaries and the literary persona she created in them” (“A Dusting Off” 58). Benjamin Lefebvre commends Monika Hilder for not “look[ing] for signs of authorial intent in these private documents” (9), implicitly indicating the tendency of critics to regard life writing as being historically accurate and transparently autobiographical. Indeed, in his article, Sturrock posits the need to resist the temptation of confusing the persona of the autobiography with the writing person and/or regarding statements therein as the “last say” for the rest of the writer's literary canon:

. . . for the theorist, the autobiographical text has to be brought out from under this too close tutelage of the life it represents; it has to be isolated even from the oeuvre of which it may purport to be the final rationalization. The theorist's loyalty is to the genre, and he reads autobiographies not as gratifying evidence of how it is possible textually to establish one's coherence as a living entity but in order to integrate these texts successively in whatever theoretical model of the genre he has thus far been able to build, either as

confirmation of its soundness and capacity to incorporate new evidence, or else of the need to overhaul and enrich it. (23)

While it may be tempting to consider the persona in life writing as authentic, it must be recalled that the life writing text is, as are other literary works, a crafted work worthy of being studied accordingly.

The role of the scholar of autobiography is to look at the construction of the life writing text to determine, not necessarily something about the person who wrote it, but the way in which the text functions as a construct of words. Ellen M. Ross asserts that “Autobiographies are not literal translations of life events but artistic constructions, works of self-interpretation . . .” (527).²⁸ Rubio writes in relation to Montgomery and her journals that “a person writing an ‘autobiography’ in the form of recopied journals is essentially creating a ‘constructed’ character” (“A Dusting Off” 70-71). Sidonie Smith explains that “Because the autobiographer can never capture the fullness of her subjectivity or understand the entire range of her experience, the narrative ‘I’ becomes a fictive persona” (46). In her article on Montgomery’s journals, Turner claims that “autobiography is no closer to life than other genres are . . . [A]ll autobiographical acts are fictions” (94). While this last position may be a bit extreme, it does emphasize the fact that life writing—including “the narrative ‘I’”—cannot be taken at “face value,” and that the texts are crafted and constructed literary works.²⁹

²⁸ Indeed, scholars have demonstrated, most notably Rubio in her recent biography, that Montgomery’s full story is not present within the journals: “These journals . . . began to seem to us [her and the other co-editor of the *Selected Journals*] a cache of concealments, displacements, contradictions and omissions. . . . [E]ventually they became another layer to excavate through” (1).

²⁹ Indeed, Montgomery herself boldly states that “biographers and historians can never arrive at ultimate truth about anybody or any event” (*SJ* 4:129). Though Montgomery perhaps was not thinking of including *autobiographers* in this statement, scholars have since shown the ways in which this type of statement indeed applies to one’s own life writing, including Montgomery’s journals specifically.

As autobiography theory tends to, this thesis will treat Montgomery's journals as autobiographical fictions; that is, while recognizing that the journals are not absolute truths, nor comprehensive portrayals of the writer of the journals, they do present, as Rubio suggests in her biography, "*a truth*" (1), one that exists in an indeterminate though real relation to Montgomery. As Klempa states in her thesis on Montgomery, "On one level Montgomery's journals are a record of her life and her thoughts on various experiences of her life. However, they are a literary construct, and as such we cannot find in them the 'true' Montgomery. We catch glimpses of her but we never see her fully revealed" (32-33). This thesis will not be concerned with the degree to which Montgomery accurately portrayed a literal translation of her life, but rather will consider the interesting ways in which she constructed her "self."³⁰

As Laura Higgins identifies in her article on Montgomery's journals, "in recent years there has been much scholarly attention devoted to the constructed nature of the 'self' which appears in autobiography and life writing" (101). Podnieks recognizes that though there are in fact different "versions of selfhood," she maintains that "theorists of life writing generally acknowledge that the self is always to some degree invented . . ." (5). Podnieks further asserts that "[h]ow we interpret the self impacts on how we read a diary" (5). There have been varying lenses through which autobiography scholars have viewed the "self"; arguably, there are many "selves" of Montgomery in her journals, or, to put it another way, different autobiography theories allow for different readings of Montgomery's journals.³¹ Scholars

³⁰ See Rubio's biography of Montgomery for a more comprehensive portrait of the *person* that Montgomery was, not just her self-constructed *persona* in her life writing.

³¹ An interesting aside to this theoretical discussion is Montgomery's own admission, in a letter to Ephraim Weber, in which she states "there's a hundred of me" in contradistinction to him thinking there were merely "two of [her]" (*The Green Gables Letters* 24). Montgomery explains "Some of the 'me's' are good, some *not*."

have theorized Montgomery's self-construction as a woman and as a public figure, a famous author. While these considerations have been taken into account when studying the self which Montgomery portrayed in her journals, there has not been an approach in life writing theory that fully considers Montgomery as a Presbyterian/Christian: that is, in terms of her identity and religious self-construction in her journals. Judy Simons writes, "as in all autobiographical writing, the diary constructs a fictional persona, a version of the self that the diarist wishes to project, however unconsciously" (12). It is undeniable that one part of Montgomery's construction of her "self" in her journals, whether unconscious or deliberate, includes a religious dimension.³²

When speaking about the "self" and identity in terms of gender, autobiography or life writing critics tend to emphasize the *social construction* of gender. Sidonie Smith in her book *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* (1987), maintains that she "understand[s] the 'self' of autobiography not to be an a priori essence, a spontaneous and therefore 'true' presence, but rather a cultural and linguistic 'fiction' constituted through historical ideologies of selfhood and the processes of our storytelling" (45). This position is in opposition to *essentialism* – the idea that there is an essential or biological aspect of one's being that one is born with, in this case, that all female persons possess. A social understanding of gender is in opposition to or in a relationship of tension with a biologically essentialist understanding of being female. Such theorists usually recognize that there *is* an essential female self, but that its reality cannot easily be separated from the social

It's better than being just two or three, I think—more exciting, more interesting. There are some people who are only *one*. They must find life as insufferable a bore as other people find them" (25).

³² Indeed, in her biography on Montgomery, Rubio notes that, along with Montgomery's extended family and her community's social attitudes, "her religion . . . fed into the inner person who lay at the core of her diary" (51).

construction of that self. The construction of the religious self can be seen in a similar manner. Though it is not a perfect fit, we may discern in the journals a tension between the social constructions of Montgomery's Presbyterianism/Christianity and her spiritual "essence": she constructed her "self" as being in a complex relationship with both.

Religion may be seen as a social construct that includes creeds/doctrines as well as the overtly social aspects of the religion. In contrast, the religious essence can be seen to include the truths that a person believes not merely because he/she was taught them in a particular religion, but because these truths are self-evident or revealed to or intuited by the person due to a recognition of truth by his/her spirit. Montgomery's religious identity in terms of the social construct of the church and her spiritual essence, however, cannot be so easily divided, as in the tendency to give over-simplistic assumptions such as that she was spiritual but not religious. Her essence/spirit could be said to recognize the spiritual, not only in non-socialized contexts but also within the overtly social construct of the church. As Montgomery herself asserted, "Neither [her passion nor her Puritan conscience] is strong enough wholly to control the other," and both aspects are indeed a "blend" (*SJ* 1:213) in her construction of the "self."

Currently in autobiography theory, methods to explore religion as a means of self-construction in modern texts have yet to be fully developed. In her study *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography* (1999), Linda H. Peterson notes that the supposition that men's and women's autobiographies are inherently different has largely remained unchallenged. She maintains that there needs to be a re-examination of the centrality of gender, that scholars be open to "[o]ther possibilities—that gender may not be the crucial factor in some autobiographies, that other allegiances ([such as] religious, regional, political,

or social) may be equally important,” but that thus far, “these possibilities have been underexplored” (2). While religion may not be “the” crucial factor in examining Montgomery’s life writing, this aspect is nonetheless an important one and will be evaluated here as a crucial means through which Montgomery constructed the self in her journals.

While there does not appear to be a life writing theory focused on religious identity and the construction of the self that could be applied to a modern text like *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery* (a text which is not overtly “religious”), the historical roots of life writing provide an important background for this consideration. Some of the earliest and most notable autobiographies discussed in life writing theory are overtly and generically religious, often referred to as “spiritual autobiographies” and “conversion narratives.” Augustine’s (354–430) *Confessions*, John Bunyan’s (1628–1688) *Grace Abounding* and John Henry Newman’s (1801–1890) *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* are especially noteworthy examples. In addition, there has been recent recovery work in women’s spiritual life writing such as studies on the medieval female autobiographies of Julian of Norwich (c.1342–c.1416) and Margery Kempe (c.1373–aft.1438). Though quite different from each other, these works are shaped by religious consideration in their content, structure, and modeling.³³

Along with the autobiography, the genre of the diary is also recognized as having religious roots. Podnieks refers to Robert Fothergill as having identified four pre-diary habits, one of them being the “journal of conscience.” She states that it was “established as a genre in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by the Puritans and the Quakers. It

³³ See the beginning chapter of Bruce D. Hindmarsh’s *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (2005) for an overview of the historical development leading up to the conversion narrative in early modern England.

provided a prescriptive place where the inner life of the conscience could be examined in religious terms” (19). Fothergill indeed writes,

Something of the Puritan motive for diary-keeping, and the ensuing character of the written document, can be seen to survive in diaries which are well beyond any conscious responsiveness to Puritan spiritual discipline. In fact it may be argued that the practice of self-examination in moral terms, which is seldom absent from even the most ‘secular’ diaries, may derive in part from the Puritan equation of serious self-communing with strict examination of conscience. (17)³⁴

The spiritual autobiography seems to have been one of the main genres of autobiography, and the spiritual diary or “journal of conscience” one of the main pre-diary genres of diaries/journals. That is, what may generally be seen currently as the secular writing of diaries and autobiographies seems to have its roots in a religious genre. Considering the history of autobiography and life writing, with its roots in religious seriousness, as well as Montgomery’s own quite traditional Protestant background, which encouraged self-examination (as Rubio argues in “L.M. Montgomery: Scottish-Presbyterian Agency in Canadian Culture” 93), it would seem quite appropriate that Montgomery’s journals be studied through a lens that would consider her religion as being important to the way in which she constructed her journals, and the identity she represented within that work.

³⁴ Blodgett in her Introduction to *Capacious Hold-All: An Anthology of Englishwomen’s Diary Writings* (1991) likewise maintains that “The diary of conscience was the ancestor of the secular diary preoccupied with the inner life that was to emerge in less religious times” (3-4) and asserted that “we must . . . credit religious faith for encouraging diary keeping” (3). Furthermore, Sheila Ottway more specifically affirms that “in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries devout Protestants were encouraged to keep a diary as a means of spiritual self-examination. By recording their daily successes or failures in living a godly life, these diarists could ascertain the extent to which they had been granted divine favour, and the likelihood of their eternal salvation” (234). From this research, it appears that the very reason for keeping a diary in the early modern period was intrinsically connected with religious considerations, and that the “diary” or “journal” “of conscience” was at least in some cases a predecessor to the secular, introspective diary.

While Montgomery may have had “nothing *new* to say” in her life writing (as Doody asserted in reference to Montgomery’s religious expressions), she did have *something* to say, which, when considered in reference to autobiography theory and the ways in which she constructed her “self”—particularly as a Presbyterian who was also “unorthodox”—is especially interesting and worthy of study. The purpose of this study is not to evaluate the degree to which Montgomery’s religious views were synonymous with or differed from her predecessors and/or contemporaries; rather, it is an examination of ways in which Montgomery presented her self through the tensions she encountered in her self-identity as “unorthodox,” a Presbyterian, and a seeker of truth, and to consider the ways in which a reconciliation is possible between her social and essential religious identities.

CHAPTER 2

“cloak[ing] her real self under an assumed orthodoxy”:

CONSTRUCTION OF THE UNORTHODOX SELF
IN MONTGOMERY’S JOURNALS

Referring to the religious tension in Montgomery’s life and novels (“That Unholy Tendency to Laughter”), Monika B. Hilder claims that “Many scholars address the conflictual nature of Montgomery’s religious viewpoint(s)” and goes on to cite several scholars who have done so: Frank Davey, Elizabeth Rollins Epperly (*The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*), Deirdre Kessler, Rosemary Ross Johnston, and Gavin White. The articles by these scholars are not all explicitly about “*Montgomery’s* religious viewpoint(s)” *per se* but also (or rather) about the views expressed in Montgomery’s fiction. Indeed, the cited passages from Davey’s article (180-81) and Epperly’s book (35) clearly discuss the closing passage of *Anne of Green Gables*, in which Anne quotes a certain passage from Robert Browning that has religious significance. Additionally, while Kessler claims to be talking of “Montgomery’s work” in commenting that it had “a numinous, profoundly spiritual dimension” (234), the rest of the article refers explicitly to Montgomery’s *fictional work*, more specifically—again—*Anne of Green Gables*.¹ In making her claim about these scholars having noted “Montgomery’s [conflicting] religious viewpoint(s),” Hilder evidently assumed that, at least to a degree, Montgomery’s own religious views were what were being portrayed in her

¹ For other works that almost exclusively deal with religion/spirituality in *Anne of Green Gables* (rather than in her life writing or a fairly equal combination of both fiction and life writing), see for instance John R. Sorfleet’s “From Pagan to Christian: The Symbolic Journey of Anne of Green Gables” (1999) and Christiana R. Salah’s “A Ministry of Plum Puffs: Cooking as a Path to Spiritual Maturity in L.M. Montgomery’s *Anne* Books” (2009).

fiction.² The other two articles Hilder mentions in her introduction (Johnston's and White's) do indeed look at Montgomery's life writing in part, though they do so largely in a comparative relationship to her fiction. All assume, then, at least to a degree, an authentic and unified religious viewpoint behind Montgomery's writing, both in her fiction and life writing.³

By contrast, in life writing theory, the question of authenticity is suspended in favour of an investigation of the ways in which the writer has constructed the self. To apply life writing theory to religious self-identity in Montgomery's journals, then, is to focus on *how* at least as much as on *what* Montgomery wrote about her beliefs and doubts. In the article in which Rubio wrote of her and Waterston's task of editing the *Selected Journals* ("A Dusting Off"), she reflected upon what she might have done differently were she to edit the journals again. One of the tentative changes she contemplated making in retrospect was that in the Introductions, she perhaps would have been overt about the fact that Montgomery's journals were subjective and highly crafted works: "I . . . wonder if I should have said more about the advisability of reading the journals with a sceptical eye, pointing out the obvious that there are two sides to every story . . ." (70).⁴ This statement serves as a reminder that as inquisitive readers—to say nothing of scholars—we must be suspicious and analytical in approaching Montgomery's representation of religious identity.

² In addition, see Kathleen Miller's "Transfiguring the Divine: L.M. Montgomery's Emily Trilogy and the Quest Towards a Feminine Spirituality" (2005), in which Miller spends the first three-and-a-half pages of her eleven-and-a-half page article (not including notes) discussing *Montgomery's* religiosity and spirituality before discussing "Montgomery's reinterpretation of Christianity" in the Emily trilogy (147).

³ Hilder's own article, "That Unholy Tendency to Laughter": L.M. Montgomery's Iconoclastic Affirmation of Faith in *Anne of Green Gables*," likewise, as the title suggests, looks at Montgomery's religious views *as expressed in the work of fiction*. Hilder does, however, compare the fiction with statements from Montgomery's life writing, including her journals.

⁴ Rubio, however, seems to again change her mind, indicating "But perhaps this is not a good idea: I think that it might have undercut the authenticity of the journals with many unsophisticated readers" ("A Dusting Off" 71).

In his book on Evangelical conversion narratives (2005), D. Bruce Hindmarsh notes that, regarding the self in autobiography, “The concept of identity (‘this is that’) underlies the metaphorical nature of self-description. . . . To identify oneself is therefore to answer the question, ‘Who are you?’ or, in the context of autobiography, ‘Who am I?’ These questions invite an answer in the form, ‘I am *like* . . .’ this or that; that is, by positing an identity between myself and something else” (8). As will be seen later in this chapter and others, Montgomery constructed her religious identity, in part, in relation to ‘something else.’ Instead of answering in her journals “‘I am *like* . . .’ this or that,” Montgomery, for the most part, conversely contrasted herself with others by answering “I am *not like*” this other thing in terms of religious identity, often in contradistinction to “orthodoxy.”

In a reflective entry in her journal, Montgomery listed one of the only suitable Sunday-approved readings that she had while growing up as *The Memoir of Anzonetta Peters*, which she identified as “the biography of a child who at five became ‘converted,’ grew very ill soon afterwards, lived a marvellous patient and saintly life for several years, and died after great suffering at the age of twelve” (*SJ* 1:376).⁵ Montgomery recounts rebelling against the portrayal of this saintly child: “it discouraged me horribly—for Anzonetta was so hopelessly perfect that I felt it was no use to try to imitate her” (*SJ* 1:376). Montgomery, however, *did* recall trying to imitate her by quoting whole hymns in her early journals (journals which she had since burned by the time she recounted this). Once after writing her favourite hymn in her journal, Montgomery recalled recording, “‘I wish I were in

⁵ Anzonetta’s biography, *The Young Disciple; or, A Memoir of Anzonetta R. Peters* (1837), was written by the Rev. John A. Clark who, in his Preface, indicated that Anzonetta had been “formerly under his pastoral care—and in whose spiritual welfare he felt a deep interest” (4).

heaven now, with mother and George Whitefield⁶ and Anzonetta B. [sic] Peters.’ But I did not really wish it. I hated the very thought of it. But I believed I *ought* to wish it and so I tried to!” (SJ 1:376). Through retrospection as an adult, Montgomery identifies having felt an obligation to feel a certain way while apparently simultaneously rebelling against this model of prescribed perfection; similarly, much of her narrative of her religious identity in her later journals also resists the standard models of spiritual autobiographies and conversion narratives.

Discussing women writers’ autobiographies, Mary Jean Corbett addresses those “of strong religious commitment.” Among other things, she states that,

religious autobiographers present their lives as exemplary: though by nature imperfect and sinful, they tell human stories that illustrate the workings of God’s goodness and Satan’s evil. As living examples, useful and beneficial to others who are working out their salvation in their personal lives, they are not fictitious, but real: autobiographies are not unique but particular, and as such they are powerful texts for others to read. (76-77)

Yet, reading the ‘real’ religious biography of an exemplary child-saint was not a source of moral inspiration for Montgomery, but rather one of immense discouragement and frustration. While many religious women wrote their autobiographies in part to be examples of good Christian lives, Montgomery turned away from such a purpose in her life writing (though her journals could perhaps be used as a *modern* example, an idea that will be returned to in the final chapter).

⁶ The editors of the *Selected Journals* identify George Whitefield (1714-1770) as having “joined John Wesley’s Methodist movement and became an extraordinarily effective evangelical preacher” (SJ 1:415).

In discussing the subjects in his book, Hindmarsh identifies most of them as having “found their deepest identities in their religious experience. And they typically answered the question ‘Who am I?’ by telling stories of their conversions” (10). Hindmarsh continues:

The central image and etymological root of the word ‘conversion’ is ‘turning,’ and its semantic field is wide. Consequently, conversion appears as a polyvalent term that depends much upon its context for its meaning. Turning from what to what? Converting from what to what? When linked to the term ‘gospel’ or ‘evangelical’ . . . conversion is immediately freighted with theological meaning deriving from the Christian tradition. (10)

In addition to Hindmarsh’s semantic treatment of “conversion,” Lewis R. Rambo in his book *Understanding Religious Conversion* (1993) notes that in addition to “turning,” conversion can also mean a *returning* (3). In speaking about the structuring of conversion narratives, Hindmarsh notes that conversion was “the defining moment in [a specific writer’s] life and he structured his entire narrative around it. . . . Everything that preceded his conversion was prologue; everything that followed was epilogue” (1).

By contrast, Montgomery’s “conversion” at a revival meeting that she attended as a young woman was not a life-changing event in the traditional way, nor was she to leave a record of a religious, devoted Christian leading an exemplary life.⁷ In these and other ways,

⁷ In an entry detailing the physical relationship she had had with a young man when she was engaged to another, Montgomery noted that she had not been concerned with moral considerations in regards to the intimacy. In her affair with Herman Leard (which has been demonstrated by Rubio [*Gift of Wings* 100] and Gammel [“*I loved Herman Leard madly*” 129] and others to not be the entire story, and actually quite constructed in its account in the journals), Montgomery transgressed grossly from what Corbett declares *religious* autobiographers (women writers who were religious and then wrote their autobiographies) do: that is, to present their lives as exemplary lives to follow. While it is true that Montgomery remained chaste in the affair, her rationale for doing so when tempted was far less than what would have been considered exemplary reasons, which Montgomery herself hints at:

What saved me? What held me back? No consideration of right and wrong. I was past caring for *that*. No tradition or training—that had all gone down before the mad sweep of instinctive passion. Not even fear of

her journals do not fit the structure of either a conversion narrative or a spiritual autobiography. In fact, as it is constructed in her journals, the change following her “conversion” was a self-realization of her divergence from Presbyterian doctrine, not her adherence to it.⁸

In recalling the event, in which a noted evangelist came to Cavendish, PEI for a “revival meeting,” Montgomery admitted, “I hardly know what induced me to ‘join the church’ then” (*SJ* 1:197).⁹ Though Montgomery prefaces the portrayal of the event with her inability to account for joining the church, she proceeds to outline factors which contributed to her public “conversion”: “The whole air seemed to be thrilling with a kind of magnetism and it was hard for anyone to resist the influence, especially one so extremely sensitive and impressionable as I am,” noting that her cousin wanted to be converted, and would not have presented herself had Montgomery not gone forward (*SJ* 1:197). Thus, Montgomery concludes, “partly for her sake, partly because I was tired of being urged and pestered and harangued every time a revivalist came around, I surrendered and ‘came out,’ too” (*SJ* 1:197). Though Montgomery claims she “hardly [knew] what induced [her] to ‘join the church,’” she gives three contributing factors: the evangelist’s emotional appeal, a sense of

the price the woman pays. No, what saved me from Herman Leard’s dishonouring love was *the fear of Herman Leard’s contempt*. If I yielded—he might despise me! . . . If it had not been for that I realize that I would have plunged recklessly into that abyss of passion, even if my whole after life were to be one of agonized repentance. (*SJ* 1:217)

Montgomery certainly does not present herself as an exemplary Christian in this situation, though she ultimately resists temptation.

She also failed to offer an exemplary portrayal of a dutiful minister’s wife in her journals, but rather was resentful of the work of her role (an aspect which will be looked at in more detail in chapter three).

⁸ The idea of Montgomery’s anti-conversion narrative was first introduced to me in a talk given by Kathleen Patchell entitled “Touched by the Spirit: L.M. Montgomery and Nellie McClung” at the 2009 Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities Conference at Carleton University, Ottawa.

⁹ As John Webster Grant points out in his article “Presbyterian Revivals” (1997), these did exist in the Maritimes—and around the time that Montgomery was writing about—however counter-cultural a *Presbyterian* revival meeting may seem to some today.

Christian(?) responsibility/mentoring for her cousin, and her pragmatic wish not to be bothered with the question of ‘conversion’ again.

Montgomery distances herself from the event and the spiritual ramifications that ought to have accompanied it by asserting concrete and practical reasons why she claimed she “got converted,” when, from a spiritual and intellectual standpoint, she overtly indicates that she was *not* genuinely converted (i.e. had not turned or returned to the Christian Gospel), and in fact adamantly distances herself from such a supposition. The reasons she gives for converting all appear to fit under a social-construct model of the church, but have nothing to do with following an essential part of herself. Perhaps Montgomery had not finished her thought when she said she hardly knew what had induced her to join: she lists the factors, but none of them indicates what may be considered an actual, *spiritual* conversion. Instead, she details that she joined for primarily social pressures and reasons. She ends the paragraph by stating, concerning her ‘conversion,’ “I think it was a mistake, for I put myself in a false position. To ‘join the church’ meant assenting to certain teachings which I did *not* and *could* not accept” (*SJ* 1:197). Here, Montgomery makes it clear that her beliefs—her understanding of truth—differ from those orthodox beliefs found at the community revival meeting, though she appears to be more intent on declaring this doctrinal divergence and justifying her reasons for acting against her authentic beliefs than outlining what specifically it was she “did *not* and *could* not accept” and what exactly her alternative beliefs were. That she was honest in her account of the revival meeting seemed more important to her than acting falsely in a public “conversion.”

If Montgomery had either a “turning” or a “returning” at the time she was publicly “converted,” her depiction of the event did not appear to be the traditional and expected turn

toward the Gospel, but rather a self-conscious turn *away* from it, or a consciousness or realization of having already turned away from it. Montgomery answers the question “Who am I?” by implicitly contrasting herself with what a revival meeting Christian convert should look like, and, while not having a fixed religious alternative at the time of the writing of her “conversion,” she concludes that, whatever she was, she was *not that*. In much of the rest of her journals, Montgomery continued to establish her identity negatively, as in *not* “orthodox.” Indeed, in *The Years Before ‘Anne’* (1974), Francis W.P. Bolger refers to Montgomery as “emphatically unorthodox” (203).

Orthodoxy, for Montgomery, referred to the accepted opinions of members of the congregations of the small villages/towns to which she belonged, both in rural PEI and small-town Ontario, where she lived and worked as a minister’s wife; her definition of “orthodoxy” appeared to have more to do with accepted opinions formed in these communities than with the church’s official statements of practice and belief. As Hilder points out, with reference to *Anne of Green Gables*,

On the one hand, as Rubio argues, Montgomery is inseparable from her Scottish-Presbyterian identity, given that she is informed by socio-religious principles (‘L.M. Montgomery’ 100-01). On the other hand, this adherence to a cultural ethos informed by Christianity does not in and of itself constitute what many regard as essential Christianity—belief in the central creeds regarding sin, atonement, and redemption that results in a personal faith in Jesus as portrayed in the Judeo-Christian Bible that remains constant despite denominational variations. (“That Unholy Tendency to Laughter” 36)

Largely, it was a community-accepted “orthodoxy” that Montgomery compared herself with and rebelled against in her journals, not a predominantly core “essential Christianity.” Hilder notes that Montgomery held a “conscious rejection, in her life writing, of Christianity (*as frequently practiced by her denomination*)” (39, emphasis added), implying a more limited sense of how Montgomery was using the term. In comparing Montgomery’s rejection of religious beliefs in her life writing with the imagined, “living” faith that Hilder detects in *Anne of Green Gables*, Hilder notes that Marilla, a central character in the novel, is “the idol of Cavendish Presbyterianism, a socially-constructed ‘orthodoxy’” (39). In considering Montgomery’s construction of a rejected “orthodoxy” in her journals, this thesis will regard, to an extent, the “orthodoxy” which Montgomery was rejecting as a “socially-constructed ‘orthodoxy,’” one which Montgomery imagined was upheld by both the Presbyterians in Cavendish and later in the small Ontario towns where she and her husband ministered.

Hindmarsh further explains regarding identity in autobiography that “self-understanding is negotiated socially in the context of the other. Identity is constructed by myself and bestowed by the other” (9). Though Montgomery constructed her “self” in her journals as being either “unorthodox” or sometimes as “orthodox” (again, in relation to individuals in her community), it is in fact, as Hindmarsh notes, the “other” who bestows Montgomery’s identity onto her. From the perspective of religion, this “other” determines whether Montgomery is “orthodox” or not. For Montgomery, this “other” could be at least two separate groups: one, the people in the communities in which she lived, and two, the readers (fans, descendants, and critics) that Montgomery reasonably assumed would later read her journals. Though neither the community members nor the successors can clearly enter into her journals to bestow an identity on her, Montgomery imagined and presupposed,

respectively, reactions that each group would reasonably have when reading, and, arguably, Montgomery constructed her religious self in her journals in such a way so as to prompt (whether consciously or not) certain interpretations. For the most part, Montgomery constructed her self as being unorthodox, both in the imagined reactions of community members and in the imagined reactions of her successors.

When constructing her self as “unorthodox,” Montgomery did so in a sophisticated manner by using contrast as a means of establishing her position. She compared and contrasted her current “unorthodox” beliefs with the “orthodox” in her communities: one, with the views of well-meaning “Christians” in her childhood; two, with views of later adult members in her communities; and three, with the imagined responses of community members. She also, though rarely, contrasted her beliefs with members of her community who subscribed to “heresy,” making her beliefs appear comparatively orthodox. In these and other comparisons, Montgomery constructed her self as having a mature spiritual belief, rather than an uneducated or inexperienced one (contrary to the ones she portrayed members of her community as having). In rejecting orthodoxy, Montgomery portrayed her beliefs to be founded upon experience, truth, and honesty, elements which are important in her religious self-construction.

Montgomery recounted several instances from her childhood of well-meaning “Christians” who tried to teach her what Hilder termed “Cavendish Presbyterianism, a socially-constructed ‘orthodoxy’” (39). Montgomery distanced herself from the views of these Christians in two ways: one, by using recollection instead of immediacy in conveying the episodes, and two, by contrasting her own mature religious/spiritual understandings (even by implication) with those of the “orthodox” Christians in her childhood: she

contrasted her own beliefs, even implicitly, with those of the “orthodox” from her communities, portraying these “orthodox” people as misguided and misinformed, in memory and/or retrospective analysis.

In one entry, Montgomery recalled three Sunday school teachers of her childhood: “None of them did anything to make Christianity beautiful or appealing or even clear to me. Indeed, they rather prejudiced me against it, since they were ‘Christians’ and I somehow had the idea that to be a Christian meant to be as ugly and stupid and—and—well, as *unromantic* as those ‘good’ women were” (*SJ* 1:378). In writing the entry, Montgomery does not construct her current self as *not* being a Christian, but as not being a *certain kind of* Christian: the Cavendish “orthodox” kind that, among other things, is “stupid,” being unable even to articulate with clarity the basic beliefs of the religion to a child. The implication is, of course, that Montgomery, at the time of writing the entry, had come to understand what being a Christian really meant, and that *she* was more Christian than “those ‘good’ women” were. In depicting these Cavendish religious women (implicitly “orthodox”) as “stupid,” Montgomery debunks any appeal to orthodoxy while simultaneously making a contradistinction between them and her, implicitly constructing her self as being intellectually honest and thoughtful, authoritative and correct in her own religious beliefs.

Montgomery also considered an incident from her early childhood in which her Grandmother Macneill made her pray to God to ask for forgiveness when Montgomery was not emotionally or spiritually prepared to do so. In Montgomery’s reflection,

It was a dreadful thing for her—for anyone—to do. To force a human soul to utter words of prayer when it was not in a fit state to do so—when stormy rebellion and bitterness filled it. Grandmother never realized what she had

done but she filled me with a lasting sense of disgust with and hatred for prayer and religion—what she called prayer and religion at least. (*SJ* 3:21)

Montgomery uses this incident from her childhood, along with what she regarded as her Grandmother's (supposed) "prayer and religion," in contradistinction to her own religious convictions: "It was not until I grew old enough to think for myself and began to realize that real prayer—real religion—was something very different from pattering formulas and going blindly through certain meaningless ceremonies that I escaped from the influence of that day" (*SJ* 3:21). Montgomery claims her own mature beliefs to be based on something far deeper than "pattering formulas" and "meaningless ceremonies"; her beliefs were compatible with intelligence: it was after she had "[grown] old enough to think for [her]self" that she comes to understand the error of her Grandmother's "religion." Montgomery constructs the recalled incident, with additional reflections, in such a way as to demonstrate the lack of "real religion" in her Grandmother's "religion," while simultaneously offering a contrast by implying the thoughtful intelligence—to say nothing of correctness—of her own genuine faith.

Montgomery also contrasted her beliefs later in life with those of a former school girl friend, Laura Pritchard, whom she had met in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan when she had lived there with her father for a year in her youth. Years later when they meet again after having little contact, Montgomery does not construct Laura as stupid or unpardonably ignorant in the same way she had depicted others who were "orthodox." She does, however, acknowledge a child-like innocence about her friend that accounted for her naiveté in theological matters, from which Montgomery distances herself: ". . . Laura is something of a religious devotee. . . . She has a firm conviction that 'the Second Coming' is very near, even

at the doors. . . . Dear Laura—she is so dear and sweet and lovable that nobody minds her theological vagaries. . . . I shall not hurt her dear heart by letting her suspect that I do not believe in the second coming or a literal garden of Eden” (*SJ* 4:70-71). Even in providing a favourable account of her friend, Montgomery still uses her friend’s relatively “orthodox” position to Montgomery’s advantage in constructing her self as being intellectually thoughtful in her own theological conclusions and beliefs.

Along with citing the overt views and practices of Presbyterians in the communities in which she lived, Montgomery also contrasted her position with ones that she imagined members of her community to hold. At different points in her journals, Montgomery imagines the reaction of the “orthodox” of her community; she thus constructs her self as being intellectually honest and thoughtful in her weighing-out of religion. While living in Halifax, she records in her journals an experience in attending the Universalist Church¹⁰:

I found it quite interesting but certainly would not care for it as a steady thing . . . The music was charming and I enjoyed the whole service but couldn’t exactly see where the religion came in. I couldn’t help smiling as I imagined what some of the dear orthodox bodies in Cavendish would think of the whole performance. To be sure, they wouldn’t understand half of it and the other half would probably fill them with horror. (*SJ* 1:270-71)

Montgomery clearly takes a certain rebellious delight in imagining the “horror” of the “orthodox bodies” of Cavendish, were they to attend a similar service. While imagining that their reaction would be an emotional and irrational one, Montgomery constructs her own response as being measured and honest. She distances herself from orthodoxy by positioning

¹⁰ In a note in the *Selected Journals*, editors Rubio and Waterston explain the Universalist Church as the “Universalist Church of America, founded in Gloucester, Mass., in 1779; Universalists believe that it is God’s purpose to save every individual from sin through divine grace revealed in Jesus Christ” (*SJ* 1:411).

herself in opposition to the “dear orthodox bodies” of Cavendish: they would have understand only “half” of what had been said and done while Montgomery implicitly had understood it all; and while the other half of the service would have filled them with horror, Montgomery implicitly had a level-headed response to even the most unorthodox parts.

In considering Montgomery’s self-construction, it should be noted that she was not assenting to all the beliefs and practices she encountered in this Universalist Church. While she asserts that she “found it quite interesting” and that “the music was charming and I enjoyed the whole service” (positive evaluations which, implicitly, the “orthodox bodies” of the Cavendish church would not have condescended or even known enough to have given), she also declares that she “certainly would not care for it as a steady thing” and “couldn’t exactly see where the religion came in.” Montgomery’s criticism of the service, however, does not hinder her from “smiling” as she imagined what the Cavendish orthodox would think of it all. Montgomery’s delight, in this instance at least, appears to be not in *her* unorthodoxy—she admits none here, but simply the open-mindedness of attending another church and presenting her own evaluation of it in a more-or-less unbiased and intellectually and spiritually honest estimation—but in imagining the shock of the “orthodox bodies” at mere exposure to the service. Thus, Montgomery *plays* with the idea of the unorthodox, to a certain extent siding with unorthodoxy while not embracing it, and actually simultaneously agreeing more with the Cavendish orthodox than with the Universalists. What Montgomery does in comparing herself with the “orthodox bodies” of the Cavendish church is assert her spiritual and intellectual maturity over them: *she* could understand the entire service/performance; *she* would not react emotionally to divergences in their practices (reacting with, say, “horror”): *she* would calmly and measuredly evaluate the truth in the

experience without bias or emotion. In this instance, Montgomery asserts her authority by distancing herself from a certain kind of “orthodoxy” while continuing to present herself implicitly as being orthodox in her beliefs. Montgomery positions her “self” as a believer, as being spiritual, but as a certain kind of believer and possessing a certain kind of spirituality. She, once again, asserts her spiritual credibility, this time by contrasting her own spiritual maturity with the imagined reaction of Cavendish “orthodox bodies.”

Additionally, when Montgomery imagines experiencing religion in nature, embracing a kind of pantheism, she emphasizes the unorthodoxy of it, as though that very fact gave her delight. She also admits, however, her cowardliness in being unable to fully realize her imagination. After complaining about having to go to church twice in one day, positing that once is enough and that “Sunday is supposed to be a day of rest but in reality it is as hard worked a day as any in the week,” Montgomery gives the “ideal Sunday in my mind. Only, I am such a coward that I cannot translate it into the real, but must drift on with the current of conventionality” (*SJ* 1:162), indicating here a divergence between what her true, *essential spiritual self* yearns for and what is socially accepted—and followed. Her ideal is thus:

But I would *like* to go away on Sunday morning to the heart of some great solemn wood and sit down among the ferns with only the companionship of the trees and the wood-winds echoing through the dim, moss-hung aisles like the strains of some vast cathedral anthem. And I would stay there for hours alone with nature and my own soul.

I think that would really do me great good. But how dreadfully unorthodox and *odd* it would be. The local spinsters would die of horror. (*SJ* 1:162-63)

Montgomery explicitly sets up the imagined “horror” of the local spinsters against her own imagining of what her “ideal” Sunday would be. She imagines that the spinsters, were they to know, would have an emotional reaction instead of weighed and careful consideration—something that Montgomery constructs herself as having, in opposition to those who merely, like the “orthodox bodies” she imagined, reacted emotionally.

In reference to a Presbyterian Elder and his wife, Montgomery also highlights her own rightness of belief by contrasting it with the “abnormal . . . form of their peculiar brand of so-called religion” (*SJ* 3:49). Montgomery exposes this couple’s beliefs in her journals as incorrect, though they themselves believed themselves to be “orthodox” in their beliefs. As Montgomery constructed them, this couple held rather “peculiar” views on Christian religion. “Tonight,” Montgomery writes, “William told us that they had given up the use of pork almost totally because it was contrary to Scripture, and that he never sowed mixed seed because it was forbidden somewhere in the Old Testament!” (*SJ* 3:50). Though in her journals Montgomery does not specifically and overtly clarify that these practices were not Presbyterian beliefs, she nevertheless severely implies this with her opening statement about their “peculiar brand of so-called religion,” as well as by illustrating other non-Presbyterian beliefs which they held (*SJ* 3:49-50). However, in denoting them such, the implication, of course, is that Montgomery’s belief is more correct than their “so-called religion,” that even if she herself is unorthodox, there is a vast difference between her unorthodoxy and their gross interpretation of the (Christian) Old Testament.

Similar to rebelling against a certain kind of orthodoxy, Montgomery also made a contradistinction between hers and another kind of “unorthodoxy”: one not based on careful reflection or analysis. She contrasted her beliefs with those of overtly *unorthodox* beliefs to

show her relative conservatism and loyalty to the Presbyterian church/Christianity, and to highlight that a more important consideration than orthodoxy was religious insight and conclusions based on honest and thoughtful reflection. As for others and their unorthodox beliefs, Montgomery both criticized and sympathized with them, but also used their positions in her journals to clarify her own position in developing her self-construction.

In one of the communities in which Montgomery lived, she encountered a professed heretic and wrote of her reaction to him in her journals: “he is everlastingly trotting out some ancient ‘heresy’ which he plainly thinks must prove very shocking to anyone so orthodox as he evidently supposes a Presbyterian minister and wife must be. If poor Amos only knew how out-of-date his questionings are to me—the hoary old problems of Cain’s wife and the seven-day creation and all that” (*SJ* 2:333). Montgomery does not contrast her position against a “socially-constructed ‘orthodoxy’” but rather against real religious questioning or attacks from another. However, Montgomery still depicts herself as more thoughtful and mature, even when comparing her views with “heresy,” as the positions which this man gave her did not “shock” her (an emotional reaction) and they were, to her, out-dated and implicitly already worked out or duly refuted or at least considered already. Thus, in a different though somewhat similar manner to her comparison to the “orthodox” of the communities, Montgomery also constructed her “self” in contrast to those who considered themselves “unorthodox” and equally dismissed their positions as unintelligent. She constructs herself not as emotionally reacting against the “heresy” but, rather, implicitly acknowledging her own unorthodoxy while carefully distancing herself from a certain kind of foolishly provocative unorthodoxy that this man expressed.

At a later point, Montgomery recounts the beliefs of a minister who visited her and Ewan: “He doesn’t believe in the immortality of the soul, the Virgin birth, the deity of Jesus. Yet he preaches in a church which requires such belief. I do not blame him for not believing them. Very few thinking people do believe in miracles now—though most of us believe in some kind of immortality. But he should not be preaching them when he doesn’t believe them” (*SJ* 3:238). Montgomery overtly sympathizes with this minister when she acknowledges that “Very few *thinking people* do believe in miracles now—though most of *us* believe in some kind of immortality” (emphasis added). That is, Montgomery aligns herself with those “thinking people”—whether or not she was one who believed in miracles is somewhat irrelevant and ambiguous here—and thereby offers her sympathy while simultaneously endowing herself with intellectual authority in spiritual matters. Not only does she offer sympathy then, but does so, it would seem, for the purpose of or as a technique to emphasize her own authoritative position. While Montgomery could sympathize with the minister for possessing his private beliefs, she criticizes his hypocrisy in preaching against them. In making this judgment, Montgomery seems to fail to realize, or at least to sidestep, her own position as a minister’s wife with unorthodox beliefs, even if she did not stand at a pulpit and preach against them each Sunday. Montgomery constructed her “self” as unorthodox, but not so unorthodox (“most of *us* believe in some kind of immortality”) or as hypocritical as a minister who preached that which he did not believe.

Montgomery also depicted her *rightness*, if not orthodoxy, by comparing her religious practices with those who appeared to uphold a more official orthodoxy. Montgomery’s own husband—a Presbyterian minister—is someone who apparently held more or less orthodox beliefs. She states that “When I married I had a touching belief that

ministers always prayed. Even I, who no longer believed many things of the old creeds, had never given up my habit of nightly prayer or lost a certain faith that there *was* a Power who would hear it.” After her own recounting of religious practice, she contrasts herself with Ewan: “How much more, then, should a minister, who *did* believe the old creeds fully, still pray. It was a distinct shock to me to find that Ewan never prayed, except for the prayer at family worship” (*SJ* 3:87). While constructing herself as being unorthodox, Montgomery also criticizes others who do not follow, practice, or preach their own beliefs, and in doing so, implicitly constructs herself as more fully following her beliefs (even if unorthodox) than they are.

As seen in this chapter, Montgomery constructed her “self” in contradistinction to elements traditionally found in conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies. She rebelled against the conversion of the saint-child Anzonetta, she diverged from the content and structure of “conversion narratives” in her own “conversion” account, and she distanced herself from a certain kind of “orthodoxy”: a “socially-constructed ‘orthodoxy’” of the members of the communities in which she lived. She contrasted herself against her depictions of “orthodox” people as they often reacted emotionally or traditionally, whereas she constructed her “self” as considering religious questions in a measured and honest way. One of the ways in which she presented their views as erroneous was to construct them as believing for emotional rather than intellectual or experiential considerations or reasons. Montgomery also contrasted herself with those who were supposedly orthodox in their beliefs (such as an elder and ministers) to show the ways in which she was perhaps more loyal than they were to convictions, or at least more intellectually and spiritually honest. This consideration of Montgomery’s construction of being honest in developing her beliefs,

as well as her self-construction of seeking the truth, will be looked at more fully in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 3

“My Presbyterian Church has gone”:
MONTGOMERY’S PRESBYTERIAN IDENTITY
IN HER JOURNALS

A discussion of Montgomery’s religious identity would be incomplete without a consideration of her identity as a minister’s wife. In the entry in which she announces her engagement to Ewan Macdonald, Montgomery proclaims, “I was most certainly not in the field to get me a husband. Neither had I the least hankering to be a minister’s wife” (*SJ* 1:321)—a curious admission, when the man she had agreed to marry was none other than the local Presbyterian minister. She strives to make it perfectly clear in her self-construction that she neither sought nor wished to be a wife or, more specifically, a minister’s wife. She then goes on to state that “the life of a country minister’s wife has always appeared to me . . . a life in which a woman of any independence in belief or character, must either be a failure, from an ‘official’ point of view, or must cloak her real self under an assumed orthodoxy and conventionalism that must prove very stifling at times” (*SJ* 1:321). Though she imagined it as “stifling,” Montgomery did indeed—rather than be a failure in the role—metaphorically go on to “cloak her real self” in the outer vestments of a minister’s wife. In writing in her journal after her honeymoon, Montgomery again records her anticipation of this role when she writes, “I have never thought it a very enviable lot to marry a minister but when I did it I made up my mind to perform as best I could such duties as are commonly expected of a minister’s wife” (*SJ* 2:91). Here, Montgomery overtly and intentionally accepts this role, with all its expected duties. “Before the congregation,” Montgomery later writes after she

had been a minister's wife for some time, "I must wear a mask and assume a cheerfulness I am far from feeling" (*SJ* 2:176).¹

Not only do these last three passages indicate Montgomery's disdain for but acceptance of becoming a minister's wife, they also all convey this reluctant acceptance in diction which invokes performance art and what Irene Gammel has called "masquerade."² In imagining her new position, Montgomery theorized that she must "cloak her real self," and "perform" a role, and then, after she had taken on this role, she must "wear a mask"—all language which is indicative of acting a part in a play.³ For Montgomery, her self-construction in assuming the role of a minister's wife is an outward performance in which the person underneath is masked and clothed. Like a piece of clothing, she puts on this role, "cloak[ing]"—or covering—"her real self" with it.

¹ In her thesis, Klempa identifies the mask as imagery which Montgomery uses in her journals in relation to her public roles, especially as a minister's wife:

The recurring metaphor that Montgomery used to express her public self was that of a 'mask.' . . . Upon considering her impending marriage to Ewan, she prepared to don a more elaborate mask, a mask which would not only conceal her unhappiness but would also conceal her opinions and true character. . . . The *Journals* reveal Montgomery with the mask off. But in her journals she wore another kind of mask – the mask of conscious self-construction. (30-31)

² In her "Introduction: Life Writing as Masquerade," Gammel notes that "Montgomery had a flair for the dramatic, and one common thread in this [*The Intimate Life of L.M. Montgomery*] collection is the focus on role-playing and theatricality in Montgomery's life writing" (5). Gammel goes on to state,

Scholars have linked life writing to performance, in which the writer assumes different roles, performs acts, and stages a variety of selves. . . . Montgomery took delight in what twenty-first-century critics would recognize as 'masquerade.' As Amelia Jones remarks in 'Performing the Other as Self': 'Masquerade [is] the production of the self as exacerbatedly the thing most expected – but marking this thing as fake' . . . (74). Montgomery performed herself in the images most expected of women of her time, . . . the demure author of simple girls' fiction, the minister's wife and loving mother, . . . producing socially pleasing visual selves . . . in [her] journals Yet she always juxtaposed these expected images of herself with subversive self-portraits: the dissatisfied wife, . . . the depressive sufferer, . . . [etc.].(5)

³ Indeed, in another passage from her journal, Montgomery records the observation that a member of her husband's congregation made to her, that Montgomery "always seem[ed] so bright and happy" (qtd. in *SJ* 3:16), to which Montgomery responded in her journal: "Happy! With my heart wrung as it is! With a constant ache of loneliness in my being. With no one to help me guide and train and control my sons! With my husband at that very moment lying on his bed, gazing at the ceiling and worrying over having committed the unpardonable sin! Well, *I must be a good actress*" (*SJ* 3:16, emphasis added).

The “role” of being a minister’s wife, while chosen freely by Montgomery, was nevertheless one for which she had to assume (or take on) that identity. This assumed “identity” seemed to have much more to do with her outward appearance and behaviour than with her essence or spirituality associated with her being. The imagery which Montgomery invokes with the diction of performance art indicates that the role of a minister’s wife is an external one which is *outside of her identity*. The role of minister’s wife that Montgomery assumed is, nevertheless, an important consideration in the discussion of Montgomery’s religious identity, for though it was not part of an essential identity, she did choose to fulfill this lifetime role, a role that she played very well.

Perhaps to best illustrate her commitment to and the talent of her assumed role as a minister’s wife, and to properly situate her identity, is to show what very rarely (if ever again) happened: Montgomery’s admission of defeat by the many pressing duties she had assumed as the minister’s wife:

To-day was Sunday and for once I flunked. I was simply too tired to go out. The responsibility of training the S.S. children for the annual Christmas concert has been mainly shuffled over on me this year. It is an imposition. I have more than enough to do as it is. I am president of the Red Cross, President of the Mission Band, President of the Social Dept. of the Guild both in Leaskdale and Zephyr and secretary of the W.M. Society. That is not enough forsooth but the work of training for the concert must be imposed on me, too! . . . I have not been strong since I had the flu and any strain or over-exertion seems to play me right out. So I stayed home today and rested—and thereby, I believe, glorified God. (*SJ* 2:277)

Along with the duties which she listed above, Montgomery also recorded having taught Bible classes and Sunday Schools; attended and presented talks for various meetings for missionary efforts; entertained guests in her home, including members of the congregations as well as other ministers and their wives; organized and directed plays; put on Sunday school picnics; held dinners and teas, and gone on numerous “pastoral visits” to members of her husband’s congregation. While she may have “flunked” that one day in her duties as a minister’s wife by not attending church, she did, nonetheless feel that she had “glorified God” in taking a bit of a rest, thereby implying that her own physical, emotional, and perhaps even spiritual self-preservation was more important in this instance than fulfilling an assumed role. That is to say, although members of the congregation would perhaps have seen this rest as a “failure,” Montgomery nonetheless did not construct her religious identity as being so intertwined in her role as minister’s wife that it might be injurious to her identity when she failed to fulfill some of her duties on occasion. Rather, although she mainly fulfilled all duties expected of her, she constructed her “self” in her journals as having taken on an assumed identity.

Included in the role of minister’s wife, Montgomery had to adopt appropriate conduct suitable to her role. In presenting a list in her journals of things which she liked, Montgomery indicates, “I like—or used to like before I wedded a minister—dancing and playing whist” (*SJ* 2:371). In this passage, Montgomery, with her careful wording presents the clear, assumed position that she (unnaturally) took upon herself when she “wedded a minister.” Similarly, several times throughout her journals, Montgomery commented on the fact that she must not do such-and-such a thing, for she was a minister’s wife. For example, shortly after her marriage, in a passage in which Montgomery expresses her loneliness for

true friendship, she indicates, “though I am ‘visiting’ and being visited half the time, there is no pleasure whatever for me. As ‘the minister’s wife’ I dare not talk gossip. It would be fatal. . . .” (*SJ* 2:137). Here, she directs our attention to the tension of assuming her role as minister’s wife and her conflicting desire to act otherwise by putting “‘the minister’s wife’” in quotation marks, highlighting the otherness of the assumed role she has chosen to play.

As a minister’s wife, Montgomery was well aware of the necessity for propriety in all matters of conduct, and was careful to deliberately conceal and/or censor aspects of her and her family’s life which would not have been thought fitting. After a two-year legal battle with her publishers (which would last several years longer), Montgomery wrote in her journals of her need to be at the trial: “I must make arrangements to go to Boston ‘on business.’ The parish must not suspect that ‘the minister’s wife’ is mixed up in lawsuits against her publishers. They wouldn’t think I was fit to run the mission band if they knew!” (*SJ* 2:278). While highlighting the absurdity of such a notion (a lawsuit disqualifying her from running the mission band), Montgomery simultaneously invokes the seriousness of the congregation knowing her real reasons for going. Implicitly, such a scandal could jeopardize her husband’s position.

Yet perhaps the greatest concealment Montgomery had to make was on account of her husband. A few years into their marriage, Montgomery discovered that Ewan suffered from “religious melancholia”: a conviction that he was predestined to eternal hell.⁴ Although

⁴ In her biography of Montgomery, Rubio states that at the time of Montgomery’s youth, “many [Presbyterians] still believed in ‘Predestination,’ the doctrine holding that man was inherently sinful, and only God determined who would be ‘saved.’ These ‘Elect’ (the ‘chosen ones’) were believed to be picked by an omnipotent God’s arbitrary will and pleasure – not necessarily by their good deeds in life” (19). In regards to Ewan himself, Rubio later notes:

Maud [Montgomery] says that she pried out of Ewan what was really upsetting him. It was, he said, the conviction that he was ‘*eternally lost*—that there was no hope for him in the next life. This dread haunted him night and day and he could not banish it’ (September 1, 1919 [*SJ* 2:322]). Maud interpreted this as a sign of ‘religious melancholy,’ the term used at that time to indicate a depressive mood disorder that

Montgomery never herself believed this theology (and was actually quite opposed to the idea⁵), she nevertheless had to hide from the congregation what he believed his fate to be . . . and also what *she* believed his present condition to be: psychological disorder.⁶ Upon hosting a church-sponsored event at her house, Montgomery writes, “I had to dress and smile and chat as if I had the lightest heart in the world. Had Ewan’s malady been some physical illness I could have shown my anxiety. But as it was I must hide it” (*SJ* 2:326). She had to “play the part” of the minister’s wife, *dressing* the part, *smiling* the part, and *chatting* the part amidst her turmoil. Due to the part which she had chosen to play—that of being a minister’s wife—the lawsuits with her publishers and her husband’s real condition were situations which Montgomery felt she had to conceal from the congregation, yet she exposed these situations and their extreme tension in her self-construction in her journals.

One of the best demonstrations that Montgomery’s identity as a minister’s wife was not integral to her but a performance was the bitterness she expressed in connection with that role. Not only was the role an assumed one, but it was one she did not enjoy. It is not difficult to find passages in which Montgomery expressed this secret resentment. In the following quotation, Montgomery makes her sentiments towards her role particularly clear and gripping with the analogy she chooses to employ in describing her feelings: “I remember

afflicted religious people who would naturally interpret their affliction within their religion’s conceptual framework. . . . Religious melancholics believed that they were doomed to go to eternal Hell after they died, regardless of their behaviour during life. (19)

⁵ Rubio notes that Montgomery “scorned the doctrine of Predestination as medieval and outdated, and she had read too widely to accept narrow dogmas” (*The Gift of Wings* 63). As a youth, Montgomery had been courted by a Mr. Mustard, who would go on to become a Presbyterian minister, a man who had argued “Predestination and other dry points of theology” with her. “‘As for me,’ [Rubio records Montgomery] writ[ing] haughtily, ‘a million Mustards could never make me believe that God ordains any of his creatures to eternal torture for ‘his own good-will and pleasure’ (April 6, 1891 [*SJ* 1:47])’” (*Gift of Wings* 63).

⁶ Rubio states, “Maud [Montgomery] railed against the ‘damnable theology’ that had taught him these concepts [election, Predestination, and committing the ‘unpardonable sin’], but she also believed—probably correctly—that these ideas had taken hold of him so readily because his mind was already disturbed” (*Gift of Wings* 211-13).

in an old reading I used to give years ago there was one sentence ‘The life of a minister’s wife is a sort of refined slavery.’ Bitter truth! Well, I always knew it and expected it; but when I am not well parish fetters are a little hard to bear” (*SJ* 2:145). Using the analogy of being a slave with the imagery of “parish fetters” indeed demonstrates some of the sharp resentment that Montgomery felt towards this role. Additionally, in speaking of her obligation to go with her husband to visit the various families of the congregations, Montgomery notes, “Of course I can rattle on in ‘small talk’ but in my inmost soul I am ‘cussing’ the waste of time. Real enjoyment is never a waste of time; but these horrible ‘pastoral visits’ are, I really believe, an invention of the devil himself” (*SJ* 2:137). Alluding to the devil in conjuring up an association for a function performed in the name of a religious role is indeed a harsh criticism and indicates a great deal of resentment.

In her journals, Montgomery constructed her role as a minister’s wife as an assumed identity. She presented herself in her journals in such a way as to give her readers a notion of having a privileged view: *they* knew that this was but a masquerade: a fake identity that she assumed, unknown to others, to act and play the part of “a minister’s wife” and to succeed in her performance. Readers have the sense that Montgomery showed her “real self” to them. Acting the part of a minister’s wife was not part of her Presbyterian identity but rather outside of it, an identity which she had to assume or “put on” as though a piece of clothing and one that did not suit her well.

And yet despite the role-playing, the cloaking of her “true self” and repression of her feelings, the assumed behaviours, the taxing duties, and the various pastoral and social responsibilities of her position (all elements connected with her role of being a minister’s wife), we would be wrong to see Montgomery’s Presbyterianism *only* as an inauthentic and

constraining part of her self-construct. Montgomery in fact had an authentic and deep identity as a Presbyterian. Whereas in the role of a minister's wife she constructed her "self" as merely conforming to the social expectations of acting that role, Montgomery's actual religious identity included Presbyterianism as an essential component.

Montgomery's strong Presbyterian identity is shown in her loyalty to and affection for the church. Her allegiance to the Presbyterian church is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in her strong reaction against Church Union (in which the Presbyterian church of Canada would unite with two other Protestant churches).⁷ On the day of official Church Union, June 10, 1925, Montgomery recorded: "The fatal date. When our beautiful Presbyterian church is torn asunder by those who swore to protect and cherish her. It has been a terrible day for me. . . ." (*SJ* 3:235). Montgomery's strong reaction against Church Union was not an anomaly to an otherwise absolute and consistent self-construction of "unorthodoxy" and bitterness at being a minister's wife. Rather, this reaction was the manifestation of Montgomery's deep Presbyterian identity, which visibly surfaced at the time of Church Union. Her loyalty and affection for Presbyterianism is more quietly confirmed, however, in her self-identity as and pride in being Presbyterian in the day-to-day context of social/cultural norms and familial ideals—threads of identity that run throughout her journals.

Montgomery's identity as a Presbyterian was strengthened as she encountered alternatives to her denomination. Similar to the ways in which she distanced herself from the "socially-constructed 'orthodoxy'" in her community by answering *not that* to Hindmarsh's question "Who am I?," Montgomery likewise formed her denominational identity in part by

⁷ The proposal of Church Union was to amalgamate the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational churches in Canada to form the United Church of Canada. For the Presbyterians at least, individual congregations could vote as to whether they would remain Presbyterian or become "United."

comparing her religion with others. After attending another Christian church while living in Halifax for a time, Montgomery strengthened her identity by making a comparison between another Christian denomination and her own when she recorded that she was “devoutly thankful I was a Presbyterian” (*SJ* 1:90).

It seemed that Montgomery could also more fully distinguish her identity by answering “Who am I?” in the negative with regards to Church Union. Whatever she was, she *was not* and *would not* be a member of the new United Church of Canada. Having something to contrast against seemed, for Montgomery, to give her the means by which she could clarify what she was.⁸ Montgomery both distances herself from the United Church and aligns herself with the Presbyterian church when she writes, “No matter what happens[,] our Presbyterian church can never be what it was. We have to choose between staying in a broken, crippled church . . . or going into a hybrid nameless ‘United Church’” (*SJ* 3:196). The entry of this passage is dated before Church Union occurred, but, as Montgomery portrays it, the event seemed inevitable. Montgomery depicts her affection for the church as a nostalgic longing for its strong past. She uses the personal, plural possessive pronoun “our” in front of it, clearly indicating communal ownership and identity, even compassion, as she describes it as “broken, crippled.” In contrast, her word choice leaves no one to claim the alternative as their own: “a hybrid nameless ‘United Church,’” a passage which suggests a deep affection for one church and a complete disregard for the other.

⁸ Citing some of the passages from Montgomery’s journals which are used in the following discussion, Rubio remarks that “Montgomery’s journals reveal that she and her husband remained adamantly Presbyterian when local parishes voted in 1925. . . . Montgomery stuck to her belief that the Presbyterians should stay Presbyterian, and not turn into the United Church of Canada” (“Scottish-Presbyterian Agency in Canadian Culture” 99). Perhaps even more emphatically than Rubio suggests, Montgomery’s identity in being Presbyterian went well beyond her action of remaining in the church and her belief that the church should remain as it was: these passages also reveal Montgomery’s keen sense of personal identity in being Presbyterian.

Similarly, Montgomery again shows her allegiance towards the old Presbyterian church and grief over the split one while distinguishing herself apart from the United Church: “. . . I resent the feeling of ‘homelessness’ it has brought me. I feel that I have no longer a church. My Presbyterian Church has gone—I owe and feel neither love nor allegiance to its hybrid, nameless successor without atmosphere, tradition or personality” (*SJ* 3:132). Similar to before, the Presbyterian church here is not simply “the” church, but rather “my” Presbyterian Church, this time with the first-person possessive pronoun, making the claim on the church that much more personal and intimate.⁹ And again, Montgomery uses the words “hybrid” and “nameless” to denote the United Church (indeed fulfilling its namelessness here by not even referring to it specifically). Montgomery represented Church Union as having deeply affected her sense of self-identity as she “resent[ed] the feeling of ‘homelessness’ it [had] brought [her]”—a clear indication of her sense of belonging with the (former) Presbyterian church. Additionally, her declaration that she “owe[s] and feel[s] neither love nor allegiance” to the United Church suggests that she had felt these affections for the Presbyterian church; likewise, in stating that the United Church is “without atmosphere, tradition or personality,” she again implies that the Presbyterian church—at least the former one, the one which she had known—had possessed these attributes. Perhaps it is ironic—perhaps natural—that Montgomery seemed to show the greatest amount of (or at least clearest) loyalty to the Presbyterian church after that church’s existence and

⁹ It is interesting to contrast, then, an entry in which Montgomery bemoaned her husband’s negligence in helping to raise their sons, stating that he had “never ... attempted to teach or train them in any respect, not even in the truths of *his* religion” (*SJ* 2:398, emphasis added). In this passage, Montgomery distances her “self” from the Presbyterian church, and instead of regarding it as her own identity (as she did at the time of Church Union), she projects it onto Ewan as part of his identity, to the exclusion of her own. While this passage in particular seems to complicate the issue of Montgomery’s personal identity as a Presbyterian, it is an anomaly, and arguably is a tactic that Montgomery used to highlight her husband’s lack of participation in the raising of their boys—even in the religion of which he was a minister—rather than being indicative of her disowning of the Presbyterian church.

continued strength are threatened. Perhaps Montgomery's reference to the Presbyterian church in the past tense here suggests that it was only a retrospective affection that she had for it; alternatively (which is the position which will be taken here), it may indicate a deep and sustained affection for and allegiance to the Presbyterian church evident throughout her journals.

Montgomery shows her personal identity in Presbyterianism in the entry in which she gave her reasons for going to church: "I go because all the associations of the church and service make for good and bring the best that is in me to the surface—the memories of old days, old friends, and childish aspirations for the beautiful and sacred. All these come back, like the dew of some spiritual benediction—and so I go to church" (*SJ* 1:262).

Montgomery's personal identity in being Presbyterian seems to be grounded, to a certain extent, in the physical church building. When visiting the once-Presbyterian church in Cavendish after Church Union has occurred, she records, "This morning I went to the 'United Church.' It is a bitter thing to me that there is no longer a Presbyterian church in the old historic congregation of Cavendish" (*SJ* 3:343). This passage suggests that, although the church building itself may hold memories for her, by virtue of its no longer being a Presbyterian church, the emphasis on the building and its associations has drastically changed with its denominational change.

Conversely, several years previous, Montgomery recounts the physical building of the "old" Presbyterian church at the time of the new one's planned erection. In a similar fashion to the way in which she longed for her former Presbyterian church at the time of Church Union, Montgomery likewise talks about the former Presbyterian church building with nostalgia before a new one has yet been erected in Cavendish. In a reflective entry,

Montgomery notes, “They tore the old church down in June. How badly I felt! I cried the day they began at it” (*SJ* 1:239). She then proceeds to give almost a full printed page of eulogy for the associations of this building, conjuring up memories from childhood which seemed to be tied into the very walls.¹⁰ At the end of her recollection, she matter-of-factly, and with a sense of finality, states, “But the old church is gone now, with all its memories and associations. They will put up a modern one which will be merely a combination of wood and plaster and will not be mellowed and hallowed by the memories that permeated and beautified that unbeautiful old church” (*SJ* 1:240). Yet this church must have “mellowed and hallowed” as it is the one referred to in the previous passage when Montgomery lamented that there was no longer a Presbyterian church in Cavendish.

Montgomery’s journals suggest that her identity as a Presbyterian was not only a personal one (manifest in Church Union, the physical Presbyterian building, and associated memories) but also one shared with her clan and community, an identity that began developing when she was a youth and continued to grow throughout her life. It is important to note that even her personal identity as Presbyterian, however, was not isolated from her immediate contemporaries (as Montgomery constructed her “unorthodoxy” to be), but an identity shared with her family and society, closely linked to her Scottish heritage.¹¹

¹⁰ Such as the memories associated with her family’s pew and the delight it had been for her to sit in the gallery on the annual “Communion Sunday ”

¹¹ The strong influence of the Presbyterian church on Montgomery’s religious identity can be at least partially traced to her regional context. In his Preface to the collection of essays *The Contribution of Presbyterianism to the Maritime Provinces of Canada* (1997), Charles S. S. Scobie notes that the “Presbyterian faith has undoubtedly been a major influence in the [Maritime] region” (ix), and later in his and G. A. Rawlyk’s Introduction, they state that “Presbyterianism was not only the largest and most influential Maritime Protestant denomination during much of the century preceding Church Union in 1925 but also one of the largest and most influential Canadian Protestant denominations” (xiii). Indeed, they write that “the century or so before Church Union in the Maritimes, with respect to its Protestant culture, may be accurately described as the Presbyterian century” (xiv). This culturally rich time in Canadian Presbyterian history corresponds with the time in which Montgomery was born and grew up on Prince Edward Island and there established her deep roots. Scobie and Rawlyk cite that in 1871, three years before Montgomery’s birth in Clifton (now New London), Prince Edward

Evidences of this deep religious identity, manifest in these different societal and familial contexts, run throughout Montgomery's journals and will be the basis of analysis for the remainder of this chapter.

The Presbyterian church was very much a social and cultural aspect of Montgomery's religious identity. In an address that she gave at the Toronto Press Club—which she recorded in her journal—she stated that Prince Edward Island was “a land where the ten commandments are still considered fairly up-to-date, but a land where it would be safer to smash all those commandments at once than to be caught without three kinds of cake when company comes to tea” (*SJ* 3:296). With this clever juxtaposition and analogy, Montgomery effectively portrays the community as being both religiously strict and socially centred. Montgomery at once points to the unified religious seriousness of her Cavendish community while gently and playfully satirizing the community's dedication to social customs and rituals. Yet even while poking fun at the religious seriousness, Montgomery

Island, a little more than 30% of the Island's 94,021 population were Presbyterian. Additionally, these editors note particularly the following regarding the chapters in their study: “It is unfortunate that there is no chapter dealing with Presbyterianism in Prince Edward Island. This is obviously an omission – especially when actual Presbyterian numerical strength is taken into account” (xiv). Though for the purposes of this project it is indeed unfortunate that such a paper was not available for the collection, the noted absence highlights the significant and historical influence of Presbyterianism on Prince Edward Island.

Rubio's article “L M Montgomery: Scottish-Presbyterian Agency in Canadian Culture” then appeared in *L M Montgomery and Canadian Culture* two years later. Not only does Rubio's article provide a concise historical summary of Presbyterianism in Prince Edward Island (and Canada), but it also discusses some of the ways in which Montgomery was undoubtedly influenced by the Presbyterian culture and ethos. Gammel and Epperly, in their Introduction to that collection, note that “Montgomery's cultural moulding is evidenced nicely [among other things] in her reflections on the church . . .” (8); the choice of diction in “cultural moulding” further emphasizes the important role that the Presbyterian ethos had in Montgomery's life. Rubio notes in her article that the cultural shaping of the Scottish culture is virtually inseparable from the shaping of the Presbyterian religion for the context in which Montgomery lived (89). According to the abstract of her PhD dissertation, Jennifer H. Litster in her work “The Scottish Context of L M Montgomery” asserts that “Scottish legacies are key to Montgomery's identity” and demonstrates the ways in which Montgomery's “clan and community genealogies are traced in the threefold examination of roots” in her fiction. In her dissertation, Litster appears to argue that “Montgomery[s] books . . . [are] either community or clan novels,” implying that the emphasis on both community and family (clan) is informed by Montgomery's Scottish (and Presbyterian) upbringing.

Thus, even outside the close readings of Montgomery's journals, it seems certain that Montgomery's identity was much culturally informed by her Presbyterian church.

evokes a sense of respect and admiration for this God-fearing community, an implicit statement about her own loyalty towards a shared religion.

As the former passage implies, the rural communities in which Montgomery lived centred on the church. In Cavendish, attending activities such as church, prayer meetings, lectures, fundraisers, revival meetings, and other church-sponsored events had an important social function in the community, as her journals attest.¹² The same is true when, as a youth, she lived in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, for a year, and, as a young adult, lived in various rural Prince Edward Island communities. Indeed, the church grounded social events for the members of Montgomery's shared communities. In an entry in which Montgomery identified some of the reasons she attended church, she stated that, "It's the respectable thing to do . . . and I would be branded [a] black sheep if I didn't go. Then, in this quiet, uneventful land, church is really a social function and the only regular one we have" (*SJ* 1:262). In this quotation, Montgomery identifies two significant aspects of the cultural and social reality of religion in her Cavendish community: religious adherence was practiced by the community at large ("it's the respectable thing to do"), and therefore attending was a matter of cultural self-identity. It is of particular note that Montgomery identified church attendance not only as a social function but as "the only regular" one of the community, stressing its centrality.

In recalling a "typical Sunday" when she visited her cousins in another rural PEI community, Montgomery stated, after explaining that they realized due to the impassable roads that if they wanted to go to church they must walk, "We *did* want to go to church—very badly, indeed! But not, I am afraid, through any excess of religious zeal or spiritual

¹² In her biography of Montgomery, Rubio likewise indicates that "church activities were the centre of village social life" (19).

urge to worship. But we wanted to see our friends. Church was, in short, a social function—almost our only social function—and we were not going to be deprived of it” (*SJ* 4:193). Similar to the quotation about the up-to-date Ten Commandments, again Montgomery highlights and gently pokes fun at religious zeal . . . only here, it is the lack thereof of she and her cousins that is the object of her playful censure. Montgomery makes fun of their “lack of religious zeal” and “spiritual urge to worship,” thereby being her own worst critic as to motives. Yet through her honesty and humour, her admission serves to highlight the social importance of attending church rather than invoke judgement on herself (in fact, it softens or even negates the gravity of the ulterior motive). In short, Montgomery constructed attending church as part of a socially acceptable aspect of being Presbyterian.

Montgomery similarly draws attention to a widely shared acceptance of the church’s social function when she recalls her (future) husband’s induction service into the ministry of the Cavendish church. Montgomery states, “It was a social function quite as much as a religious one and the church was crowded” (*SJ* 1:320). Here Montgomery gives equal weight to the religious and social aspects of the event, without the need for justification or apology. This unashamed stating of the fact seems to indicate that Montgomery (and implicitly the community at large) regarded both religious and social reasons as socially acceptable ones for attending an induction service. This portrays the social function of the church as part of a shared identity with other community members.¹³

In an entry written as a young adult, Montgomery notes, “The only *social function* we have had this summer was prayer-meeting, that faithful old stand-by” (*SJ* 1:196). As a

¹³ In the last three examples of the church also having a social function, it must be noted that Montgomery was referring to church meetings, that is, that she was not referring to the other social events which the church sponsored (which were even more social, and overtly so).

youth, Montgomery recorded attending prayer meetings and later commented on the social significance of these meetings. Though she rarely gave any detail about the events of the meetings, she often recounted their social aspect, particularly in “being seen home” by a male escort afterwards.¹⁴ As an adult, Montgomery recalls having been escorted thus: “it seems the other day to me when Nate Lockhart or Chelsey Clark ‘went home’ with me from prayer-meeting or ‘literary’” (*SJ* 4:10-11). Montgomery noted after being at church in Cavendish a certain Sunday and having witnessed a young man bashfully ask “a miss of fifteen . . . in the time honoured formula ‘May I see you home?’” that she, Montgomery, “smiled—and continued to smile as I took my escortless way across the field home. I thought of olden things and of the wonderful night, so amazingly long ago, when I, too, had an ‘escort home’ for the first time—both of us secretly and desperately elated . . .” (*SJ* 2:46). Montgomery’s admission of having “smiled—and continued to smile” as she witnessed this continuation of the social tradition—even when she herself was not currently participating in it (“I took my escortless way across the field home”)—indicates her evident approval of this new generation of youth carrying on the same traditions that she and her friends had so delighted in. It was, in fact, a social custom, elevated to a rite of initiation/passage in her Cavendish community—for a young man to ask to see a young woman home after attending church or prayer meeting: “Hers was the face of one upon whom the cachet of young ladyhood has been conferred. She was ‘grown up.’ She had ‘an escort home’!!” (*SJ* 2:46). As has been seen from the previous discussion, in the community in which Montgomery grew up, attending church and religious meetings had significant implications, socially and culturally, and Montgomery portrays herself as having accepted them.

¹⁴ See, for instance, *Selected Journals* 1:3-4, 5.

Along with the more largely social and communal aspects of the church, Montgomery had many familial attachments to Presbyterianism. She was born Presbyterian (in a largely Presbyterian community, in which she was related to most of its members) and was raised by strict Presbyterian grandparents.¹⁵ Montgomery's ancestors helped to found the Presbyterian community in Cavendish and provided the land upon which the church was built.¹⁶ Some of the key values that Montgomery upheld came from Presbyterian ancestors who passed these virtues on to their descendants.¹⁷ Perhaps more than historical considerations, however, were the implied commonality and inclusion that accompanied this shared identity. When little else could recommend them to each other, the family's shared religious identity provided a common ground upon which disagreeing family members could stand. In reference to her Aunt Emily (a relative with whom Montgomery recorded having never gotten along), Montgomery once noted, referring to her aunt, that "she was in a very agreeable mood—perhaps because she and I are both 'Presbyterian' and so had at least one subject on which we were in perfect accord" (*SJ* 3:348). This passage (dated after Church Union occurred, it may be added) could be taken at face value to indicate that Montgomery and her aunt were indeed "in perfect accord" on the matter of religion, and so shared a common (familial) identity,¹⁸ thus displaying that Montgomery's sense of familial identity

¹⁵ In a long entry on family history in which Montgomery recalled her ancestors, she emphasized family members' Presbyterian backgrounds—or else made it a point to note their non-Presbyterian affiliations (*SJ* 4:122-35).

¹⁶ See Rubio's article on Scottish-Presbyterian Agency (89) and her biography of Montgomery (19), respectively.

¹⁷ These values included rigorous intellectual honesty and keen self-examination, traits that will be examined in greater depth in the final chapter.

¹⁸ However, considering Montgomery's self-construction in her journals of being "unorthodox" in her religion, it is difficult to tell if she instead was intentionally being facetious in this comment concerning her actually being "Presbyterian" (Montgomery's "unorthodoxy" inevitably being unknown to her unsuspecting, implicitly

extended to clan members with whom she disagreed on other issues. As for matters of inclusion, in reference to her Uncle Jimmy, Montgomery recounts that another one of her aunts insisted that he was “saved” even though “he had never gone to church for many years before he died.” Montgomery explains that, “This [his lack of church attendance] was a terrible thing in the eyes of his generation and perhaps Aunt Mary wanted to throw a defiance in the teeth of anyone who might infer from it that his future fate was dubious. A Macneill *must* be ‘saved’ even if he were not wholly orthodox!” (*SJ* 4:128). In consideration of the previous chapter (and perhaps passage), this quotation, in Montgomery’s own tongue-in-cheek words, is quite interesting. However, for the matter at hand, this passage (through employing humour) demonstrates that Montgomery’s family’s—and her own?—sense of religious identity was so strong so as to overlook failings and instead include the individual in the family’s shared religion.

Despite the previous example(s), it is quite certain that Montgomery’s family, for the most part, maintained a shared religious identity with family members who were (what they considered to be) orthodox Presbyterians, and disapproved of an individual’s straying from that faith or affiliation—much less joining another religious denomination. In particular, some of Montgomery’s family held views against other religious denominations, sometimes shared by the Presbyterian community at large, though perhaps none were more strongly conveyed than the views of her Grandfather Macneill. In particular, Montgomery depicted him as disapproving of Baptists. In recalling one of the former Cavendish Baptist ministers, Montgomery noted, “During his pastorate the younger Presbyterians began to go to the Baptist church Sunday nights, looking upon it as a social outing. It was long before I was

orthodox, aunt). Whatever the case may be, Montgomery, whether orthodox or not (in her aunt’s eyes or her own here even) shared the common familial identity of being “Presbyterian” with her aunt.

allowed to go. Grandfather thought I was headed to perdition because I wanted to” (*SJ* 4:169).¹⁹ Though in recalling the event, Montgomery seems to present herself as not considering it a grave matter to attend the Baptist church, as it was only a social event, and she had other reasons for wanting to go (there was a nice corner in the church she could sit in and through the window see the maple grove outside), other places in her journals seem to indicate that she was perhaps influenced by her Grandfather’s opinions on the Baptist religion. Thus, though not as harsh, Montgomery seems to have shared, at least to a degree, some of her Grandfather’s religious views.

When Montgomery was proposed marriage by a Baptist, Edwin Simpson, she wrote in her journal, “I know my family would not approve [G]randfather is rabid against second cousins marrying; and Ed is a Baptist. For my own part, neither of these considerations would weigh against a real affection. But there is no use flying in the face of your family for anything less” (*SJ* 1:179).²⁰ For our purposes, in this passage Montgomery identified two significant aspects: one, that her Grandfather would object with great disapproval, due partly to the fact that Ed was a Baptist, and two, that Montgomery herself would discount his objections. Montgomery’s claim that “neither of these considerations would weigh against a real affection,” particularly the religious consideration, is called into question, however, when it is compared with a passage that is dated later but recounts a

¹⁹ Montgomery’s Grandfather admittedly was not alone in his prejudice, as Rubio demonstrates in her biography of Montgomery: “In the late nineteenth century, bitter religious schisms soured Cavendish tempers for many years . . . people were deeply suspicious of different faiths and ethnicities. However, the young Presbyterians and Baptists could put aside disputes if there was an interesting speaker or a “social” . . . (19).

²⁰ An interesting—perhaps ironic—piece of family history which Rubio indicates in her biography is that Montgomery’s maternal grandmother, Lucy Ann Woolner, had been an Anglican before marrying Alexander Marquis Macneill, “but she converted to her husband’s Presbyterianism, as was conventional for wives in that time” (25); the Grandfather who would be so against Montgomery marrying Edwin Simpson, a Baptist, had himself married a woman initially from another Protestant denomination who had converted in order to marry him.

childish consideration (and rejection) of the Baptist faith. In this passage, Montgomery recalls that “The Baptist and Presbyterian girls in school . . . were always disputing on doctrinal points, especially on Baptism, and I began to fear that the Baptists, and they only, were right and that I would certainly be ‘lost’ if I were not immersed. I worried over this on many a sleepless pillow and argued fiercely with myself over it for weeks” until she finally disregarded this belief (*SJ* 1:196-97).²¹ After reiterating the same two objections from her family again in a later passage in regards to Ed’s proposal of marriage, Montgomery again declares, “These things were not a serious objection to me . . .” This time, however, she adds, “although I would have preferred them otherwise” (*SJ* 1:187).

It is interesting to note that Montgomery here modifies her original statement: she initially asserts that Ed’s Baptist denomination would not weigh with her as a reason to reject his proposal; however, in this second passage, Montgomery indicates that his different religious affiliation does indeed matter to a certain extent. Although seemingly liberal in her views of interfaith marriage as compared with her family, Montgomery later wrote that she had since learned of her fiancé’s plans of study, and with that, her position decidedly shifted: “Now I found that he meant to enter the ministry. I would not have minded this so much . . . if he had been a Presbyterian or indeed any denomination but a Baptist. But to marry a Baptist minister would necessarily involve my re-baptism by immersion—a thing utterly repugnant to my feelings and traditions” (*SJ* 1:189). These successive quotations indicate a gradation of increasing rejection of marriage to a Baptist, and serve to bring Montgomery to a point of acknowledged identity as a Presbyterian. The looming threat and reality of obligatory conversion to the Baptist church, were she to marry Ed, helps to clarify

²¹ It is interesting to note that although this passage recounts earlier childhood thoughts of the Baptist church, it is not dated until after she had decided against marrying Ed and joining the Baptist church.

Montgomery's identity as a Presbyterian. Again, through this example, Montgomery is able to answer "Who am I?" by *not that* in response to the thought of becoming Baptist. While perhaps more liberal in her views of interfaith marriage than her family, Montgomery nonetheless would not consider re-baptism in another religious denomination for the sake of marriage, and appealed to her 'traditions' as a reason against it. Thus, Montgomery overtly identifies her family traditions as being an important part of her religious self-identity.

As has been seen in this chapter, Montgomery constructed her "self" in her journals as being a Presbyterian, having a personal as well as a shared social/cultural and familial religious identity. Though Montgomery reveals in her journals that her self-construction as a minister's wife was not part of her essential identity, it is evident from other passages in the journals that she did indeed have an authentic Presbyterian identity outside of—and even simultaneous with this role. Indeed, when contrasted with her contemplation of marrying a Baptist, her discomfort with her later social position as a minister's wife signifies no profound rejection of Presbyterianism (in rejecting marriage to Ed she constructed her self as protesting against re-baptism, not against the role of being a minister's wife, a role which she assumed in her later marriage to Ewan) but rather a dislike of the restrictions and duties associated with a particular community identity. In conclusion, Montgomery's identity as a Presbyterian was not merely a socialized one. She constructed her "self" as having a deep, personal identity in being Presbyterian, particularly manifest at the time of Church Union, but also throughout her life in quieter ways. The Presbyterian church was not merely an organization to which Montgomery belonged, but a place in which she felt at home (demonstrated by the contrast to her sense of 'homelessness' with which Church Union left her). This suggests that though the Presbyterian church may have included an overtly *social*

religious identity for Montgomery, she nevertheless also detected something in the organization of this particular church that resonated with her spirit. Such discernment allowed Montgomery to identify herself as a Presbyterian and to construct her “self” in her journals as having an essential as well as social identity in this particular denomination.

CHAPTER 4

“even if we never find it in its entirety”:

SEEKER OF TRUTH –
MONTGOMERY’S ULTIMATE RELIGIOUS SELF-CONSTRUCTION

In the same entry in which Montgomery recorded her “conversion” at the revival meeting—partially quoted in chapter two—she noted the deterioration of her old beliefs:

I cannot recall just when I ceased to believe implicitly in those teachings—the process was so gradual. My belief in the fine old hell of literal fire and brimstone went first—it and others seemed to drop away like an outgrown husk, so easily that I knew it not until one day it dawned upon me that they had been gone a long time. I have not yet formulated any working belief to replace that which I have outgrown. Perhaps it will come in time. These things must *grow*, like everything else. (*SJ* 1:197)

Montgomery’s working belief did indeed “grow” over time as her experiences compelled her to face various theological questions and assumptions. In an overt way, she responded to the above entry when later copying out her journals. She records re-encountering the former passage and then writes, “Since those days I *have* formulated a belief—or rather one has seemed to take shape within my mind slowly and relentlessly as experience and comparison and reflection have forced me to certain conclusions. I *know* quite clearly what I believe but I have never yet reduced it to black and white” (*SJ* 2:371). She then proceeded to do so, taking about a full (published) page. Montgomery’s “creed” included her beliefs about God, the afterlife, and souls. She begins by stating, “I believe in a God who is good and beautiful and just—but *not* omnipotent. It is idle to ask me to believe in a God who is *both* good and

omnipotent. Given the conditions of history and life the two things are irreconcilable” (*SJ* 2:371). After talking about a “Principle of Evil, equal to God in power—at least, at present,” she acknowledges that, “So far, my creed is the old Persian creed of the eternal conflict between Ahrimanes and Ormuzd. But I did not take it over from the Persian. My own mind has compelled me to it, as the only belief that is in rational agreement with the universe as we know it” (*SJ* 2:371). In this passage, Montgomery highlights some important factors regarding her belief: that she had come to her beliefs on her own and that these beliefs were consistent with intellectual reasoning: her “*own* mind” had “compelled [her] to it,” it had “seemed to take shape within [her] mind,” and she had used her reason to come to her conclusions, invoking the “conditions of history and life” and “rational agreement with the universe as we know it” as having “forced [her] to certain conclusions.” This self-construction of being a lone, honest seeker of truth, both in accepting officially orthodox positions and in rejecting others, was one that Montgomery employed throughout her journals. More than emphasizing the actual beliefs, Montgomery emphasized her process of seeking truth through personal, honest intellectual rigor.

As demonstrated in the preceding chapters, Montgomery constructed her “self” both as “unorthodox” and as having a strong identity as a Presbyterian. Given this seeming paradox—along with the fact that though she may have exaggerated her “unorthodoxy” in her self-construction, Montgomery nevertheless recorded holding beliefs contrary to Christianity in her journals (such as her belief in reincarnation or her rejection of God’s omnipotence and the creeds)—it seems counter-intuitive that in his article “The Religious Thought of L.M. Montgomery,” Gavin White—a former lecturer on church history—gives an uncomplicated, resolute claim that Montgomery’s beliefs were essentially orthodox. He

states, “ordinary people . . . will often, as [Montgomery] did, apologetically state that what they believe is not orthodox Christianity, when it usually is, though differently expressed. Such is the case with L.M. Montgomery” (87). Regarding this extraordinary claim, in her own article, Hilder notes, “Certainly it is curious to consider the possible ‘orthodoxy’ of a writer who in her life writing frequently *rejected central tenets of the Christian faith* she was raised to believe in and who is often considered to be a subversive religious writer” (“That Unholy Tendency to Laughter” 35, emphasis added). White’s claim for Montgomery’s orthodoxy does indeed seem problematic,¹ and so Hilder then considers how “the term ‘orthodox’ [might] apply to a writer considered unorthodox And [whether] these apparent tensions in Montgomery’s viewpoint(s) [are] reconcilable” (35). She concludes that “White’s perspective suggests that the term ‘orthodoxy’ should be regarded in the very broadest sense of the earnest seeker reinterpreting ‘mere’ or essential Christianity minus accrued cultural and historical baggage from practiced or institutionalized Christianity” (38). As he does, Hilder writes that she “shares White’s conception of an earnest seeker hammering out her own creed—sifting the false from the true, thus reinventing a personally tenable faith” as part of her consideration of Montgomery’s “orthodoxy” (38); thus, Hilder claims that the very earnestness and methodology of Montgomery’s quest for truth can be seen as a type of “orthodoxy.” More than a consideration of a term, however, the important aspect of this statement is that Montgomery presented herself as being a seeker of truth.

The focus of this chapter is not to determine whether or not Montgomery was “orthodox” by conducting a detailed analysis of her professed beliefs and how they either

¹ It is problematic especially given that—as Hilder claims—Montgomery’s rejection of Presbyterianism was not merely a rejection of a “socially-constructed ‘orthodoxy,’” but was also a rejection of crucial aspects of mainstream Christianity.

reflect official Presbyterian theology or differ from it; this chapter is not concerned with Montgomery's actual theological beliefs so much as with the ways in which she constructed her "self" as being a "seeker of truth"—her ultimate self-construction in her religious identity.

Montgomery constructed herself as acknowledging truth wherever she found it—in her religion, other religions, outside of religion altogether, in nature, literature, and science. A poignant example of the inclusivity of Montgomery's acceptance of truth is highlighted in a journal entry in which Montgomery asked herself why she attended church so often. As part of her answer (after having given some of the self-identified "flimsy" reasons, discussed in chapter three), Montgomery wrote, "I go to church because I think it well to shut the world out from my soul now and then and look my spiritual self squarely in the face. I go because I think it well to search for truth everywhere, even if we never find it in its entirety . . ." (*SJ* 1:262). Montgomery acknowledged that there was truth and a value of introspection to be found in attending church, as she explained that she attended to "look my spiritual self squarely in the face," but she also acknowledged that she did not limit her truth seeking to Presbyterianism: she "search[ed] for truth everywhere." (Indeed, in this passage, Montgomery seemed to be graciously open-minded to *include her church* in her quest for truth.) Rather than seeing truth as limited to what was expressed within the religion she was raised in, Montgomery's definition of truth included, but was not exclusive to, the Presbyterian religion. It extended far beyond that, with church being but a portion of the all-encompassing "everywhere" in which truth could be found.

One of the ways in which Montgomery sought truth everywhere (as Hilder, and White before her, have pointed out) was to come to her beliefs largely on her own—or at

least to construct her self as having done so. Though Montgomery's beliefs were undoubtedly influenced by her upbringing in the Presbyterian church and reinforced by her family's religious beliefs (as was noted in the previous chapter), Montgomery presented herself as having arrived at her beliefs largely through a personal and individual spiritual quest. As White maintains in his article, though she was surrounded by ministers most of her life, Montgomery rarely recorded having made use of them. Instead, her belief was "not dependent on sermons or reading, but on her own working out of problems as she found necessary" (87). Throughout her journals, Montgomery often expressed feeling alone, including in her quest for religious truth. In recalling how she grappled with different theological questions as a child, Montgomery later wrote, "I was so miserably alone—there was no one to whom I could go for help. I would have only been laughed at, or, at best, met with some dogmatic statement which would have been no help to me at all. In silence and secrecy I had to fight out my own battles and flounder through my quagmires" (*SJ* 1:196). This lament was made in relation to her recalling herself as a child of ten, when she "got it into my head that the Catholic church was the only right one and that outside its pale all were heretics doomed to penal fires! I got these ideas out of a sample copy of a newspaper called "The Catholic World" which had been sent to the post-master. Its statements were so dogmatic that they impressed me as authoritative" (*SJ* 1:196). Without feeling that she could approach her strict Presbyterian grandparents or anyone else in her tight-knit, Protestant community on religious issues, Montgomery indeed constructed her "self" as having to work out on her own the question of which church was "right," as well as other theological questions. Similarly, as a young adult, Montgomery wrote in recollection, "[s]piritually, and mentally I have always had to stand alone. I suppose it has made for strength and self-

reliance—but it is hard” (*SJ* 1:255). Seemingly without the help of ministers, parents, grandparents, or even her minister husband, Montgomery saw herself as measuring and evaluating the beliefs she came across in her and other religions in order to formulate her personal faith.

Though she constructed her self as having arrived at her beliefs on her own, Montgomery was, as argued in the preceding chapter, influenced by her Presbyterian culture and was immersed in that ethos, including its religious culture. Much of her personal identity stemmed from it. One of the principles of Scottish-Presbyterianism, which Rubio notes in her article on Montgomery and Presbyterianism, is of “valuing intellectuality” (89). This Scottish-Presbyterian trait is one that Montgomery used in evaluating her own religion – even its faults and her criticism and disbelief of certain dogma. Even though seemingly rejecting the church at times, Montgomery also seemed to have been heavily influenced by the ethos and culture of her religion in her methodology, even in rejecting the church’s teachings in her rigorous, intellectually honest endeavour of evaluating the truth:

“Montgomery remains a thinking and judging Presbyterian to the core,” Rubio claims (“Scottish-Presbyterian Agency” 100). In this way, Montgomery’s identity as a Presbyterian becomes even more complex as we attempt to separate the cultural from the dogmatic tenets of the Presbyterian religion, Montgomery’s religious identity, and the construction of these and her relationship to them in her journals.

In her biography of Montgomery, Rubio states, “In Scotland, Presbyterianism had evolved as a branch of Christianity that fought (among other things) for the right to conceptualize a different relationship with God, based on individual conscience. Followers should communicate with God directly, independently of priests or bishops (preachers were

mainly considered experts in the interpretation of the Bible, not conduits of God's word). The word of God was available in the Bible . . ." (35). More than her relationship with God, perhaps ironically, Montgomery's Presbyterian religion also granted her a certain amount of autonomy or independent thought for working out individual beliefs. It was a religion that encouraged self-examination and intellectual rigor, and Montgomery constructed her "self" as having used both in her search for spiritual truth.

As has been stated, Montgomery largely stressed having arrived at spiritual truths through reason or intellectual rigor. This way of knowing was privileged over believing due to emotions or traditions, and her self-examination allowed for an honest evaluation. Indeed, Rubio states that "The tenets of the Scottish Enlightenment of the eighteenth century had travelled with Scottish emigrants, stressing the importance of *man's reason over his other faculties, including his emotions* (*The Gift of Wings* 74, emphasis added). Again, the values that were upheld in Montgomery's Presbyterian religion provided the very means by which Montgomery proceeded to evaluate the truth of her religion and others. Furthermore, this is another instance of Montgomery answering *not that* to Hindmarsh's question "Who am I?": instead of believing something due to emotions or traditions (as was duly illustrated in chapter two in examples of Montgomery's contradistinction between her own intellectual spiritual maturity and those who believed due to emotions or traditions²), Montgomery placed her reason over her emotions in her self-construction of religious identity. This would

² This concept of Montgomery's construction of her preferred way of arriving at beliefs was introduced in chapter two, in which she constructed her "self" as being "unorthodox," thereby distancing herself from a certain kind of "orthodoxy": one prompted by tradition, bias and emotion. Montgomery compared herself with the minister who did not believe Presbyterian doctrine, yet Montgomery self-identified as one of those "thinking" individuals who yet still believed in an afterlife. Montgomery also constructed herself as being intellectually mature in her spiritual belief when she implicitly compared her spirituality with and distanced herself from those "good" Christian women who were 'stupid,' Montgomery implicitly coming to her own beliefs through intellectual honesty and reason.

not have been an easy task for someone as sensitive and emotionally susceptible as she self-consciously portrayed herself to be.

Montgomery admitted her own natural tendency to emotional susceptibility when she wrote: “I suppose I am like most people in being a helpless victim to impressions made in early years. Perhaps I am more helpless than some owing to the exceeding sharpness and depths of the impressions made on a somewhat unusually sensitive nature” (*SJ* 3:21-22). One way in which she constructed her “self” as honouring intellect or reason over emotions, feelings, and traditions, was to show that while spiritual or religious memories of emotional experiences greatly impacted her, she could distinguish and intellectually distance herself from them. For example, after recalling the incident of her grandmother forcing her to pray to God to ask for forgiveness when she was still angry (an example that was given in chapter two), Montgomery had then remarked that “It was not until I grew old enough to *think* for myself and began to realize that real prayer—real religion—was something very different from pattering formulas and going blindly through certain meaningless ceremonies that I escaped from the influence of that day” (*SJ* 3:21, emphasis added). Montgomery then admits,

And indeed I never fully escaped from it. My conscious mind cast it off at the bidding of reason; but that subconscious mind over which we have little, if any, control, retained it—retains it still. To this day the humiliation of that hour manifests itself in a *feeling* which lurks under all the beliefs and conclusions of my reason, that ‘religion’ and all connected with it was something which—like sex—one had to have but was ashamed of for all that. (*SJ* 3:21)

In this entry, Montgomery demonstrates the difference between reason and feeling and depicts the way that emotion can cloud one's subconscious mind and reasoning,³ and therefore affect one's beliefs. Making this overt and self-conscious distinction—both of the difference between emotion and reason and her own susceptibility to emotions—Montgomery gives herself credibility in her self-construction as being a seeker of truth. For while she admits her natural tendency, for the most part she does not allow these emotions or traditions to be a part of her process for arriving at religious or spiritual beliefs.⁴

Similarly, another way in which Montgomery constructed her self as being intellectually honest and rigorous in the exploration of belief was the way in which she recalled—and distanced herself from—spiritual experiences she had as a child. She recounted having held many beliefs that she later came to regard as erroneous. This in itself—the reflection across the distance of time and the correcting of previous false beliefs—helped her to claim credibility and spiritual maturity in her quest for religious truth. For example, as an adult, Montgomery recounts a Sunday when as a child she was in church with one of her aunts and “heard the minister say something about heaven. ‘Where is heaven?’ I whispered to Aunt Emily. She simply pointed upward. With childhood’s literal and implicit belief I took it for granted that this meant the attic of Clifton church. For a long time I firmly believed that heaven was there! . . . When I was a child heaven was only seven

³ The accounting of her “conversion” at the revival meeting is another example that demonstrates that emotions (temporarily) could cloud Montgomery’s reason and affect, if not her belief here, then her behaviour: she acknowledged that the entire experience at the revival meeting was quite “thrilling,” implying an emotional pull; however, she overtly acknowledged that she did not actually believe in all the doctrines of the religion.

⁴ Though she generally upheld this ideal in her self-construction, Montgomery on rare occasions admitted believing something due to emotions and/or traditions. For example, as touched upon in chapter three, Montgomery identifies both of them as reasons for not wanting to be re-baptized, an act which would have allowed her to marry the to-be Baptist minister, Ed Simpson: “to marry a Baptist minister,” Montgomery wrote, “would necessarily involve my re-baptism by immersion—a thing *utterly repugnant to my feelings and traditions*” (SJ 1:189, emphasis added).

miles away. But now! Is it not beyond the furthest star?" (*SJ* 2:44-45). This distancing also demonstrates Montgomery's development in her belief of moving from purely literal interpretations to more metaphorical ones, indicating, perhaps, an added sophistication in her beliefs. As Paul did in the New Testament, in her journals Montgomery distances her childish beliefs from her adult life: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a [wo]man, I put away childish things" (1 Cor. 13:11). Throughout her journals, Montgomery would continue to assert her spiritual authority, especially in developing beliefs, by constructing her former, erroneous childhood beliefs as in the distant past.⁵

Similar to comparing her own current, credible beliefs with those erroneous ones of her past, Montgomery also claimed authority and intellectual honesty by explicitly comparing her beliefs to those of her ancestors; she implied that hers were tested or sufficiently challenged against a changing, uncertain world instead of—as she constructed the past—received within a relatively stagnant one. Montgomery perceives a vast difference between her ancestors' era and her own when she writes she had "live[d] my life in a period when everything has been, or is being turned topsy turvey, from the old religions down. My aunts and grandmothers lived practically their whole lives in an unchanged world. Changes came to them in the natural course of life but never were the foundations of their lives torn away from beneath their feet" (*SJ* 3:259). Though it is perhaps with scepticism that we read Montgomery's construction of her ancestors' time as being one devoid of religious doubt, it is, nevertheless, the literary construction she used to present them in contrast with her own religious struggle.

⁵ Previously discussed examples include her former, childhood beliefs that Baptism by immersion was the only correct way and later that the Roman Catholic Church was the only "right" church. She distanced her spiritually mature self from these beliefs, even at the time of recording them in her journals (*SJ* 1:196-97).

In a later entry, she creates a similar contrast between her ancestors' and her own beliefs, though this time adding an emotional appeal:

I have often felt a certain envy of the women of my mother's and grandmother's generation. They lived their lives in a practically unchanged and apparently changeless world. Nothing was questioned—religion—politics—society—all nicely mapped out and arranged and organized. And my generation! What have we not seen? Everything we once thought immovable wrenched from its pedestal and hurled to ruins. All our old standards and beliefs swept away—our whole world turned upside down and stirred up—before us nothing but a welter of doubt and confusion and uncertainty. (*SJ* 4:163)

Curiously, Montgomery conveys a sense of “envy,” as she called it, perhaps nostalgia, for the “practically unchanged and apparently changeless” era of her foremothers. It is with a reluctant duty or a sense of fairness and justice, perhaps, that Montgomery constructs her self as having recounted facing religious questions honestly and intellectually while she might have preferred to have left them unquestioned and unexplored as her ancestors had largely done—at least, as she constructed them as having done.

Included in her religious investigation to “search for truth everywhere” with intellectual honesty was her “poking and probing into creeds and religions, dead and alive, wanting to know for knowledge’ [sic] sake what vital spark of immortal truth might be buried among all the verbiage of theologies and systems” (*SJ* 1:196). Interestingly, these “creeds and religions” implicitly would have included the religious beliefs her ancestors had subscribed to. Montgomery recorded having rejected some major tenets of the Presbyterian

religion (and even mainstream Christianity) in her journals yet does so largely on intellectual grounds, constructing her self as having given these tenets a fair evaluation. While Montgomery admitted having “always possessed a deep *curiosity* about ‘things spiritual and eternal,’” and wanting “to *find out*—to *know*” (*SJ* 1:196), she appeared to have excluded more than included the beliefs found in the creeds of Christianity in her final estimation of truth. Montgomery indeed was particular to note that she did not believe in the creeds (as will be seen in the following paragraph). Thus she acknowledges the creeds—seemingly giving them a fair consideration—but she does not accept them in the main. Rather, she sifts through them for the “vital spark of immortal truth” . . . and seemingly rejects the rest.

In contradistinction to the systems of old creeds and dogmas which were being preached in the churches, she wrote that *nature* was a place “where we could drink of the wine of God’s sunshine in his eternal communion that knows *no restrictions or creeds*” (*SJ* 1:240, emphasis added). Later in her life as a minister’s wife and having experienced nature again as she had not done in five years, Montgomery reflected, after having spoken with a woman who held rather outrageous religious views, “I wondered what the God with whom I had been in close communion half an hour before on that windy green hill of clover would think of it all. Would He not have said, ‘Ye are all my children, blind, helpless, stumbling, mistaken, torturing yourselves with the *creeds and dogmas of your own invention* . . .’” (*SJ* 3:133, emphasis added). Additionally, after having read Henry Sienkiewicz’s world bestseller *Quo Vadis* (1897), this historical romance of the “perfect picture of the splendour and corruption of Imperial Rome and the court of Nero,” Montgomery reflected that could “the pure and awful beauty of early Christianity . . . but have retained its primitive simplicity, instead of becoming *overgrown with dogma and verbiage* [it] would be as potent

a force today as it was when the martyrs of the Colosseum sealed their faith with their blood” (*SJ* 1:223, emphasis added). Throughout her journals, though she gave consideration to the creeds and dogmas, Montgomery consistently expressed disbelief in the theology which they expressed and implicitly criticized what—in her estimation—was their negative contribution to the church that Christianity had become. Her final estimation of the creeds was that, whatever she believed, it was *not that*.

Through the wave of religious doubt that swept the world, Montgomery boldly asserts, “For myself I have my own foundation and I stand firmly on it, unalarmed and unhurt by the crash of creeds and systems” (*SJ* 3:259). Montgomery had presented or constructed her ancestors’ religious world experience as relatively stable and noted the instability, particularly in religion, which had erupted in her own lifetime. She, however, claims to have been “unalarmed and unhurt by the crash of creeds and systems,” as she had already considered and rejected the creeds that her ancestors had held onto so strongly. It is, however, curious that Montgomery would make such an assertion that her beliefs were “firm” (implying an unchangeable resolve that had solidified long ago) when contrasted with the passage quoted earlier in this chapter regarding the self-conscious need for her beliefs to “grow” (now that she had “outgrown” her old ones). That Montgomery’s beliefs had evolved significantly over time, and continued to do so after this entry, is quite evident. Constructing her surviving beliefs as firm, then, suggests that they had been tested in the refiner’s fire of religious confusion and ruthless questioning, a construction which presents itself as a testament to their assumed soundness.

Considering this self-construction, not only in the statement overtly contrasting her beliefs with those of her ancestors but also her demonstration of having consistently rejected

the creeds throughout her journals, we may note that while Montgomery constructed her beliefs as firm, her resolve to stand by them was not. Although she largely constructed her self as being “unorthodox” in her journals, she was reluctant to disclose what her true beliefs were to her community as well as to outline them distinctly, consistently, and clearly to future readers (and perhaps herself). She claimed through her journals to seek the truth, yet she also admitted her reluctance to stand by it publicly, as was suggested in the recounting of her “conversion,” and by the following journal excerpt:

What a grand saying it is—‘Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.’ It is the greatest of the great Teacher’s sayings. Were I a minister I would preach one sermon on that—only one for I would certainly not be permitted to preach any more! It would reek with heresy. The truth *does* make us free—but only when we have the honesty to accept it and the courage to tell it. I think I have the former but I have not the latter. I am a coward and dare not tell the truth as I see it and consequently I am not free—I am a slave to old customs and conventions and old rules. But that is not the fault of the truth. It *would* make me free if I told it. But even freedom may be too costly a thing—for us weak ones at least.

Jesus told the truth—and he was free, as no man ever had or has been free. But his society cast him out—and his world crucified him for it. The world always has crucified those who tell it the truth. *That* is the price to pay for freedom on this planet. (*SJ* 2:121)

Though Montgomery’s religious doubting may, as Doody maintains, have been typical of her time, it was not typical of her place: to a large extent, Montgomery’s predecessors and

small-town contemporaries were, or had largely been, living in an era of Christian belief. Therefore, Montgomery emphasizes the troubling difference of her situation from that of her ancestors and friends, emphasizing her uniqueness and aloneness. As a minister's wife, Montgomery faced real ramifications were she to publicly voice what she believed to be the truth, since her idea of truth diverged from the "socially-constructed 'orthodoxy'" of her surrounding community. The consequences would not have been anything as severe as a literal "crucifixion," a biblical allusion that Montgomery evokes in the passage. However, in keeping with her more metaphorical, rather than literal, interpretations of the Bible, it is possible that were Montgomery to have voiced her "unorthodoxy" and revealed her "true self," she may very well have suffered a kind of metaphorical crucifixion in the community in which her husband worked as a minister. Before her marriage, in the entry in which she announced her engagement, she theorized that a minister's wife "who had any independence in belief or character, must either be a failure . . . , or must cloak her real self under an assumed orthodoxy" (*SJ* 1:321). Highlighting her "independence in belief" and the necessity of "assumed orthodoxy," Montgomery claimed that were she openly to express what she constructed as her genuine "unorthodox" beliefs, the consequences would have been severe. In writing her journals, she constructed her "self" in such a way as to highlight this extreme tension between her alleged "real self" and the masquerade of minister's wife (which she presented to parishioners but revealed in her journals), a position in which she could not tell the truth as she saw it.

In her self-presentation as a seeker of truth, Montgomery always had a keen awareness of audience. As explained previously, autobiography theory acknowledges that authors of life writing write their narratives with a heightened sense of their audience; this

attention shapes or informs the ways in which the authors choose to tell their stories. Simons notes that “by their choice of mode as written documents[,] all diaries imply readership” (10). Additionally, Podnieks claims that “journals of conscience and journals of personal memoranda [categories into which Montgomery’s journals arguably fit], would seem by definition to be secretive in nature. Yet evidence suggests that each type of diarist was never wholly indifferent to the prescriptive functions of the text and thus never unaware of an audience for that text” (18). How much more, then, were already published writers aware and conscious of their audience when writing their autobiographies. Corbett notes that religious women writers are quite concerned with the autobiographies they write because they realized the nature of their lasting impression on their reading public, not only of the writers’ lives but also of their entire oeuvre: “Their explicit intention in representing themselves is to control the way in which their readers, contemporary and future, will read them,” she states (73). Montgomery indeed writes *in her journal* that “biographers and historians can never arrive at ultimate truth about anybody or any event” (*SJ* 4:129), leaving open, however, the possibility that perhaps an *autobiographer* could “arrive at ultimate truth” about her own life and life events. Corbett cites one particular woman author who “assumes that the text of her life can be appropriated, and defends against that possibility by writing autobiography, by telling her story in her own terms. Their [spiritual women writers’] texts function in part, then, as public means of shaping and controlling their selves . . .” (72). Montgomery, likewise, took the control of her life story into her own hands by telling it herself, undoubtedly aware of the conflicting personae of her “self” that she would be combating in having her journals published, even posthumously. Montgomery was clearly keenly aware that her journals had significant literary value and that she was writing with an

audience in mind—her descendants, fans, and critics—as Gammel (“Introduction: Life Writing as Masquerade” 3) and others have duly noted.⁶

A woman as perceptive and aware of her audience as Montgomery was would also have known that to be able to write convincingly and seriously, she would have to construct her narrative to take into consideration the seemingly inevitable world views that were being ushered in with modernity, most significantly, religious doubt. “The world is upside down,” Montgomery wrote in a journal entry later in her life. “All our cherished beliefs and traditions have gone by the board” (*SJ* 4:146). As many scholars have pointed out, Montgomery expresses much religious doubt in her journals. “The Spirit of God no longer works through the church for humanity,” Montgomery boldly claims. “It did once but it has worn out its instrument and dropped it” (*SJ* 3:211). Furthermore, she claims that “In childhood I had very deep religious instincts but I do not seem to possess them now. I am not in the least spiritual—that is, in the ordinary meaning of the word” (*SJ* 2:394). Though numerous, these and admittedly the many other proclamations of religious doubt made by Montgomery in her journals—in comparison to the rest of the self-construction that was looked at in this thesis—raise the question as to their sincerity, or at the very least, their consistency with her other religious self-constructions. One may, in fact, conjecture that references to doubt may have seemed necessary to Montgomery as proof to her readers that she was not locked in an unquestioning past, reliant on tradition, as many of her neighbours (and, as, she constructed them, her ancestors) were. Expressions of doubt could paradoxically affirm and authorize those beliefs that she continued to uphold amidst the shattering of traditional belief. Indeed, she may have seen doubt as giving credibility to the

⁶ A clear example of this awareness is seen in the way in which Montgomery constructed herself in her journals as a minister’s wife who held unorthodox views: in this construction and demonstration of her masquerade, she *appeals to her readers’* emotions for sympathy as to why she feels unable to voice her true beliefs.

beliefs which she did hold, especially in a time when traditional “truths” were being questioned so sharply. Montgomery achieves this credibility by constructing her “self” as “unorthodox,” making intellectual rigor her method of identifying truth in her religious quest, and in claiming those beliefs that did last as “firm.” At a time when the world was doubting, or, at a time in which Montgomery could reasonably assume that the readers of her published journals would be immersed in a world of religious doubt, her own reason for upholding her beliefs had to be based on intellectual criteria, not on emotions or traditions. Similarly, religious doubt had to be considered, and, to a certain extent, embraced.

Truth was more important to Montgomery than the “socially-constructed ‘orthodoxy’” of the local church communities, or even “official” orthodoxy at large. This preference, which promoted her self-construction as a seeker of truth due to intellectual honesty and rigor, suggests an awareness and anticipation of her audience in a secular, doubt-filled world. Unlike Anzonetta’s frustrating and unrealistic account of exemplary behaviour, the account that Montgomery presents in her journals of a tension-ridden spiritual and religious identity is one that can reasonably be seen as, if not morally exemplary, then at least realistic. It is precisely due to this non-exemplary element of self-construction that the reader is invited to sympathize with Montgomery’s conflicting religious tensions instead of becoming alienated from a highly unrealistic and conventional model (as was the case with Montgomery’s encounter with Anzonetta’s conversion narrative).

Instead of an account filled merely with doubt and despair, unorthodoxy and tension, I would like to suggest that Montgomery’s religious self-construction and identity in her journals is ultimately an account of hope and faith, both in God and in her readers. Instead of Anzonetta’s biography of a frustratingly perfect saint-child, Montgomery in her journals

presents an honest portrayal or example of a truth-seeking, spiritually and intellectually honest individual. This model of a highly unconventional conversion narrative or spiritual autobiography may well speak much more powerfully to a post-Christian society than anything like Anzonetta's biography would likely do as a means of spiritual conversion literature. Though of course not explicitly a religious autobiography (religion is but one of the "selves" of Montgomery that we can focus on in autobiography theory), the journals nevertheless have much religious content and, though differing significantly from Anzonetta's account, Montgomery's journals still fit into the category which Corbett outlined as necessary for spiritual autobiographies: "As living examples, [they are] useful and beneficial to others who are working out their salvation in their personal lives" (77). In contradistinction to Anzonetta's narrative, Montgomery's journals can be compared to what she referred to as "an autobiography by Corra Harris,"⁷ a woman whom Montgomery identifies in her journals as being "a writer of some note in the U.S." whose experience "was very like [Montgomery's] own" in one "striking respect": "She was the wife of a minister who fell a prey to religious melancholia" (*SJ* 3:247).⁸ In her journals, Montgomery quotes a

⁷ Without having read her works, I am uncertain which of Harris's autobiographies Montgomery had been referring to. John E. Talmadge identifies "[t]hree of Mrs. Harris' [sic] *novels* [to be] frankly autobiographical: *My Book and Heart* (1924), *As a Woman Thinks* (1925), and *The Happy Pilgrimage* (1927)" (143, emphasis added), while Donald Mathews identifies them as "her three autobiographical *books*" (362, emphasis added), *My Book and Heart* as "her first autobiography," *As a Woman Thinks* as "a second series of autobiographical essays" (363) and *The Happy Pilgrimage* as a "series of lay sermons" (as described by a contemporary Boston newspaper, a description that Mathews agrees with in theory without its implied dismissal) (qtd. in Mathews 363). As the date of Montgomery's entry was 1925, it at least limits the choice of Harris's "autobiographies" to the ones of 1924 and 1925. The editors of the *Selected Journals* do not provide a note regarding Corra Harris or her literary work.

⁸ It is interesting to note that while Montgomery claimed it was only in this "one striking respect [that Harris's] experience was very like [Montgomery's] own" (*SJ* 3:247), Harris did, as did Montgomery, question her religion while remaining an active member (and performing the role of minister's wife) in it. Referring to Harris, Mathews writes, ". . . anyone interested in what women of a certain age thought and valued in the 1920s would find it a revelation as to just how heretical and spiritually independent a woman thought to be a traditional Christian could be as she contemplated her life and death" (363), a claim which some critics may deem applicable to Montgomery. Mathews continues: "She wondered how she might have fared under the piety of early days, shuddering perhaps as she confessed being 'temperamentally opposed . . . to being burned at the

long paragraph of Harris describing her experience of feeling utterly isolated and alone in living with a husband who suffered this conviction. Following the passage, Montgomery notes, commenting on it, “Oh, true, true! ‘The silence you dare not break by one call for help.’ It is as if my own heart had uttered that moan. And ‘holding my breath in those years of suspense.’ Yes, how often have I held mine since that ghastly spring of 1919” (*SJ* 3:247). Though Anzonetta’s biography was morally exemplary, Montgomery as a child could not relate to it and was frustrated in being unable to live up to the ideals presented in it. As an adult, however, Montgomery found a sort of solace in being able, on a very personal and real level, to relate to another woman’s difficult yet honest religious experiences. Podnieks claims that in spiritual diaries it is discernible that “private matter did not necessarily exclude the possibility of the journals being read by external audiences” and goes on to quote Lawrence Rosenwald, stating that “while it was not the practice of New England Puritans to show their diaries to their contemporaries, they were ‘injoined to preserve them for the use of their biographers and the edification of their descendents’ (10)” (19-20).

Like the writings of Corra Harris, who had faced real-life challenges to which Montgomery could relate, Montgomery’s journals in turn could reasonably be seen as an example left as a sort of edification to other doubting yet intelligent and spiritually seeking believers, or as Corbett wrote, be a “useful and beneficial [example] to others who are working out their salvation in their personal lives” (77). In her autobiography of her literary career in *The Alpine Path*, Montgomery writes what she hopes her account will accomplish: “If it does nothing else, it may serve to encourage some other toiler who is struggling along

stake for my religious convictions’ (*Happy Pilgrimage* 107)” (363), an admission that sounds strikingly similar to Montgomery’s own of shrinking from telling the “truth” due to the repercussions of inevitable “crucifixion” which would then follow (*SJ* 2:121), a concept discussed earlier in this chapter in relation to the cited journal entry.

the weary pathway I once followed to success” (9). In a similar way, Montgomery’s journals may be said to provide an example that could help others “struggling along the weary pathway” of religious questioning and identity. While her journals are not an exemplary moral account like traditional conversion narratives or spiritual autobiographies, they nonetheless are filled with *hope* because though Montgomery constructed her “self” as being unorthodox, Presbyterian, and, above all, intellectually honest in her quest for truth, *she still believed*.

To recall Hindmarsh’s estimation of the “self” in autobiography, “Identity is constructed by myself and bestowed by the other” (9). Montgomery certainly constructed her “self” in a relationship of religious tension and wanted her readers to think that her religious identity was a “blend” in her make-up. Whether Montgomery was “orthodox” or not is a judgement not intended to be made by this thesis; rather, her religious self-construction in her journals suggests that she wanted her readers to view her religious self-identity as highly nuanced, and perhaps paradoxical: she was an unorthodox Presbyterian who came to her beliefs largely through intellectual rigor and honesty (eschewing emotions and traditions in this consideration) in her quest for and acceptance of truth; and yet, in her final journal entry, amidst claiming that her “mind is gone” and that her “life has been hell, hell, hell,” she cries out with something that outweighed her despair – a plea made with hope, and, ultimately, faith, that perhaps does not differ so very much from conventional conversion narratives after all: “Oh God, forgive me” (*SJ* 5:350).

CONCLUSION :

REFLECTIONS ON A THEORY OF RELIGION IN MODERN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

This thesis has focused on an element of seeming paradox in L.M. Montgomery's self-construction, in which both a Presbyterian and an unorthodox identity are by turns, and simultaneously, asserted. From this analysis it is clear that, though a religiously subversive writer,¹ Montgomery nevertheless did not construct her "self" as rejecting religion in total. Though in her journals Montgomery professed to hold beliefs heterodox to Presbyterianism and, at times, to Christianity in general (even if her unorthodoxy was exaggerated at times), she still appears to have held onto some Presbyterian beliefs and to have had an affection for and loyalty to the church, which is perhaps most notably confirmed in the example of her strong reaction against Church Union.

In her religious self-construction, Montgomery transgressed conventional forms of conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies. In addition, the content of the religious material in her journals deviated from traditional Presbyterian theology. Margaret Anne Doody asserts that Montgomery's beliefs were fairly typical of the time in which she lived: she was "merely adopting the most fashionable forms of unbelief in the Victorian age" (23). While this may be so, Montgomery constructed her beliefs as being atypical, emphasizing the tension between her "real [religious] self" and the mask or cloak of orthodoxy and conventionalism that she had to wear in her (public) role as a minister's wife, alone in her spiritual quest. For the rest of the doubting world, Montgomery's beliefs seem to have been

¹ As Hilder notes in "That Unholy Tendency to Laughter" (35).

fairly typical, and perhaps Gavin White is correct in asserting that Montgomery “had a religious faith not unusual to her time” (87).

The fact that Montgomery’s beliefs were not radical in fact makes her journal narrative a perfect text for the application of autobiography theory. Mary Jean Corbett affirms that spiritual autobiographies “are not unique but particular, and as such they are powerful texts for others to read” (77). This very condition of Montgomery’s journals being typical of her time or “not unique” in terms of religious content and belief (or lack thereof at times) qualifies her journals to be read as a spiritual autobiography: Montgomery’s religious questioning, however, is “particular,” a combination which makes her journals, similar to the autobiography of Corra Harris, “powerful texts for others to read.”

The conditions that Corbett identifies as necessary for traditional spiritual autobiographies could likewise be applied to conditions required for a more unconventional one: “it is imperative for spiritual autobiographers not to be (nor to feel themselves to be) extraordinary or exceptional women: to establish and maintain their authority to write, they must observe the norms that constitute appropriate feminine behaviour and avoid the eccentricities displayed by those who exceed the prescribed bounds of middle-class femininity” (73). While Montgomery was admittedly extraordinary and exceptional in her career as a world-famous author who earned a living by her writing, in other aspects she nevertheless presented herself as quite within the realm of normality in her role as a mother, her responsibilities as a wife, and her adherence to social expectations. In these and other ways, Montgomery was not so “extraordinary or exceptional” and, though she may secretly have rebelled against them, and even in her novels subversively spoken out against them, Montgomery nevertheless presented her “self” in her journals largely as “observ[ing] the

norms that constitute appropriate feminine behaviour and avoid[ing] the eccentricities displayed by those who exceed the prescribed bounds of middle-class femininity.” In not being “extraordinary or exceptional” in these regards, Montgomery’s journals give a kind of credibility to her narrative of doubt and faith. Montgomery’s narrative of religious identity, then, allows us to glimpse some of the perhaps characteristic ways in which people of faith attempted to hold onto some form of belief at a time when Christianity seemed to be in decline.

In her journals, Montgomery constructed her self in such a way—such as by comparing her beliefs with older ones (both of her ancestors and her former self)—as to be read as authentic and honest in her religious quest for truth. (She did, after all, claim that her journals were, and wanted us to believe that they were, a completely true—that is, historically accurate—account²: “This journal,” she writes in 1922, “is a faithful record of one human being’s life” [*SJ* 3:51]; scholars, however, have demonstrated the factual inaccuracy of this presentation.) In this way, Montgomery indeed was *not only*, as Doody claimed, echoing “the most fashionable forms of unbelief in the Victorian age”: she was also constructing her self as being genuine in these expressions and as having arrived at them independently and in intellectually honest ways. As Alan Jacobs writes in *Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life* (2008), Christians shape their life stories in relation to the dominant narratives of their day.³ This assertion does not, however,

² See, for example, Cecily Devereaux’s article “‘See my journal for the full story’: Fictions of Truth in *Anne of Green Gables* and L.M. Montgomery’s Journals” (2005)

³ Writes Jacobs, “What has happened over the centuries of the church’s life is the construction of an extensive repertoire of Christian life genres and the continual reinterpretation of them in light of changing cultural circumstances” (29). Earlier in this chapter, with the admonition that “there are less comprehensive genres to which we must be attentive,” Jacobs writes, “While Jesus himself provides the model upon which all Christian lives are based, and this should never be neglected, the Pauline principle of ‘many members of one body’ (1 Cor. 12) means that there will also be many genres of the Christian life, each of which emphasizes or enacts

necessarily imply inauthenticity (as Doody's assertion may suggest it would). As world views changed, Montgomery changed the way in which she wrote her story: it may be argued that she shaped her religious story to reflect the changing world around her, thus writing a narrative which re-conceptualized a new form of spiritual autobiography.⁴

As has been argued in this thesis, Montgomery's ultimate religious self-construction in her journals is as an honest seeker of truth. In an increasingly doubting world, she anticipated a sympathetic response from future readers to her account of living bound to outward religious or "socially-constructed 'orthodoxy'" while secretly harbouring doubt and unorthodox beliefs from those immediately surrounding her. Likewise, Montgomery seemed to be well-aware of her future audience when she constructed her self as being "unorthodox," distancing herself from those who believed due to mere tradition or emotions and privileging intellectual rigor and truth. This kind of presentation of identity allowed Montgomery to appeal to a doubting religious audience, while still professing her belief in such a way that her audience could at least consider and acknowledge her position as being, if not "true," then reasonable.

one aspect of Jesus' life and teaching, with others being absent or receding into the background—thus the importance of the disciples and other saints as embodiments of different genres of the Christian life" (29). Montgomery's re-conception of a spiritual autobiography, manifest in her journals, may be seen as a differing, yet important, genre in the repertoire of testimonies of Christian lives.

⁴ Another scholar who has argued for Montgomery's re-conceptualization of religion in the form of spiritual autobiography is Kathleen Miller in her article "Transfiguring the Divine" (2005), in which she argues that Montgomery developed a feminine spirituality which was manifest in her fiction and placed her in a larger Christian female literary context or tradition. Miller argues that Montgomery's "Emily Trilogy" is a series that "acts as a form of spiritual autobiography for Montgomery, reflecting her struggles with traditional Christianity" (145) and claims that through this feminine reconceptualization or "transfiguration" of religion, Montgomery "operates in the rich female literary tradition of women spiritual writers like Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Christina Rossetti who attempted to re-envision the faith of their fathers and create a place in patriarchal religion and theology where they would not be marginalized. . . . Similarly," Miller continues, "Montgomery's writing serves as an attempt to feminize patriarchal religion – to reclaim the mythic imaginary power of the feminine realm. Though Montgomery has not received scholarly attention for doing so, she too transfigures Christianity and serves as a female descendant of this larger female spiritual literary tradition" (145).

The tension between Montgomery's identity as a Presbyterian and her claim to be "unorthodox" was, admittedly, seemingly irreconcilable. However, when taking into consideration the main argument in this thesis, that ultimately, Montgomery constructed her self as a seeker of truth, her self-construction as "unorthodox" and her religious identity as a "Presbyterian" are brought into close relationship. More than either of these considerations, Montgomery constructed her "self" in her journals as an honest seeker of truth.

Transcending societal and familial expectations and traditions, Montgomery presented *truth* as her highest consideration, eschewing belief based on mere traditions or emotions (though she at times fell victim to these as well). It is clear that Montgomery's religious self-construction was, at best, a complicated one: it was not simply a matter of spiritual essence versus the social construction of the church, of Montgomery rebelling against all Presbyterian and/or Christian beliefs in silence because her husband was a minister in small, predominantly Christian towns. Rather, she constructed her self in a relationship of *continued* tension with religion in both her beliefs and identity.

As has been stated earlier in this thesis, there appear to be no working theories for examining religion as a component of identity in modern autobiographies. There are, of course, conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies with their recognized structures and patterns. There has not, however, to my knowledge, been adequate research performed and theories developed for modern autobiographies in which there is a religious element but in which the narrative does not fit into the patterns or conventions of a spiritual autobiography or conversion narrative. In the modern and post-modern contexts, conventional religious narratives no longer seem to serve this post-Christian society; certainly Montgomery's self-presentation was influenced by her expectations of a post-

Christian audience. Likewise, scholars of autobiography cannot inflict out-dated models of what religious narratives ought to (or used to) look like. New methods of analysis should be adopted and developed.

In their Introduction, Irene Gammel and Elizabeth Epperly state that “*L.M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture* calls into question such polarization between high culture and low culture and their respective social functions” (4). In this thesis, I have used a theory borrowed from autobiography studies in gender in which the “essence” of a person is balanced against her “social construction”; using this model I have regarded “spirituality” as being part of one’s essence (or spirit), and, to a degree, “the church” as being a particular social construction of religious identity. In his book *Spirituality and History* (1995), Philip Sheldrake asserts that, “The ‘spiritual’ is what is under the influence of, or is a manifestation of, the Spirit of God. A dualistic contrast between ‘spiritual’ and ‘physical,’ or body and soul, is not part of the Pauline understanding of the human person or of created reality in general” (42). I have attempted to call into question the polarization between “organized religion” and what we know now as “spirituality.” Similar to Sheldrake’s argument against a division between “‘spiritual’ and ‘physical,’ or body and soul,” in a similar manner, I argue that the term “spiritual” or “spirituality” cannot be placed in a dualistic relationship with organized “religion”; rather, it must be a component of it.

Perhaps some light can be shed on the nuanced tension of Montgomery’s religious versus spiritual identity by considering the comments of scholars on her own words. Christiana R. Salah asserts that Montgomery did not approve of the separation of the physical from the spiritual: “she worried that among the good Christians of her acquaintance, the spiritual was too often divorced from and privileged over the physical” (198). Salah then

cites White's article in which he partially quotes an idea in an entry from Montgomery's journal; Montgomery had been reading Bliss Carman and (a more complete quotation than White and subsequently Salah used follows) reflected that:

Carman insists on the tri-une cultivation of soul, mind, and body—and he is right. The great lack of Christianity—its cardinal mistake—lies in the fact that it has *over-emphasized* the spiritual—taught that the body must be mortified—or at best, disregarded as of no importance—a false and ugly—yea, and a blasphemous doctrine—blasphemous because it lowers the ‘image of the Creator’ below the brutes. Mind and soul can express themselves only through the body and therefore we should try to make it and keep it as perfect an instrument for their expression as possible. (*SJ* 1:347)

If we take this passage and apply it, perhaps project it, as an extended symbol for this thesis in theorizing the ways in which Montgomery likewise viewed *spirituality and the church*, it would follow that they cannot be so easily separated as a view such as the idea that “she was spiritual but not religious” would imply. If the *soul* could be seen as *spirituality* and the *body* as the *church*—which is, indeed, the “body of Christ”⁵—then it would follow that Montgomery's spirituality and religion cannot, in fact, be easily separated. Religion and spirituality must be considered in relation to one another, as Montgomery herself seemed to suggest (using the quotation as analogy) and that the opposite was “The great lack of Christianity—its cardinal mistake.”

Indeed, continuing with the analogy or symbol of soul as the spiritual and body as the church or “body of Christ,” Montgomery said that the *spiritual must not be over-emphasized* (as it appears to be in contemporary thought in which “spirituality” tends to be regarded as

⁵ See for instance 1 Corinthians 12, especially verses 12-27.

more important than religious affiliation/organization) and called it a “blasphemous doctrine” to regard the *body* as requiring mortification or having no importance. That is, when discussing or considering Montgomery’s spirituality or religious identity, Montgomery cannot be regarded as rejecting religion simply because her spirituality seemed at times to be at odds with it; in this way, we cannot assume that she was merely “spiritual but *not religious*.” Furthermore, the church is “the body of Christ,” organized by God, and, in the corporeal language, Montgomery reminds us that “*Mind and soul can express themselves only through the body* and therefore we should try to make it and keep it as perfect an instrument for their expression as possible” (*SJ* 1:347, emphasis added). For Montgomery, the implication would be that the church was still an instrument through which spirituality could be expressed. Montgomery’s admonition to “keep it [the body] as perfect an instrument for their [the soul and mind’s] expression as possible” does not negate or excuse the failings of an imperfect body (much like the failings of an imperfect church) but nevertheless realizes its (the body’s/church’s) necessity despite its shortcomings. In a similar way, perhaps, we can understand how Montgomery negotiated the relationship between her spiritual essence and her Presbyterian religion, seeing the church as an instrument through which her spirituality could work. She realized some of the old church’s limitations (perhaps similar to our realizing the failing health of our physical bodies as they age); nonetheless, she still saw it as an instrument for good, though she also looked elsewhere for corporeal evidence of God (such as in nature, or, later, in science).

Instead of falling into the temptation to separate religion and spirituality, Montgomery called her Puritanism and passion a “blend” in her make-up, not a dichotomy or a polarization as the Protestantism that Montgomery encountered had made between

“religion” and “spirituality.” These are not in a dualistic relationship with each other but a necessary “blend” which serves as a holistic self-construction and religious identity. Indeed, Montgomery claimed that “neither [her Puritanism nor her passion] is strong enough wholly to control the other.” So should we refrain, when considering her overall religious identity, to regard either Montgomery’s spirituality or her religion as having the capacity to control the other, or be examined, without being in context of the other: these elements (that of spirituality and religion) in a consideration of religious identity would be incomplete (as the soul and body are) without each other.

As Hilder maintains in her article and claims White to mean in his, “White’s perspective suggests that the term ‘orthodoxy’ should be regarded in the very broadest sense of the earnest seeker reinterpreting ‘mere’ or essential Christianity minus accrued cultural and historical baggage from practiced or institutionalized Christianity” (38), that is, a search for the truth of Christianity that existed *before* the creeds and institutionalized Christian religion. This precedes the time of the division that some Christian religions have made between “organized religion” and “spirituality.” Quite appropriately, it may be argued that Montgomery’s quest for truth in religion encompassed a belief in this unity between organized religion and spirituality, even though in a constant state of tension for her. (It was, after all, the ethos of her Presbyterian religion of intellectual rigor that allowed her to examine, be critical of, and even reject parts of her Presbyterian religion.) Montgomery did not reject “organized” religion in total, but a certain brand of it: a “socially-constructed ‘orthodoxy,’” as Hilder has argued, and, to a certain extent, the church that did currently exist. However, these assertions (particularly the last one) do not negate that Montgomery did believe—and continued to believe—that there *was at one time* a religion with which her

own beliefs would have been harmonious: one that existed in Christ's time—before the dogma and creeds. Perhaps the most pointed of her estimations of where the church now stood, compared to what it once had been, is her proclamation that “Two thousand years ago Jesus burst the bonds that were stifling the human race. Now those bonds are tightening around us again—outworn dogma, dead superstitions. It will take something as tremendous as his message of spiritual freedom to destroy those bonds again” (*SJ* 3:182). This passage demonstrates Montgomery's belief in a church which had existed, although also shows that her intellectual estimation could not accept that it still existed as it had in Christ's day. While she does display an immense loyalty to and affection for the Presbyterian church, she is uncomfortable with individual doctrine and procedures within it. A simplistic argument would claim that her loyalty and affection for Presbyterianism prevented her from leaving it; however, it could also be argued that she did indeed see a purpose or even the Holy Spirit working in “organized” religion, though she was honest enough to acknowledge the religion's shortcomings simultaneously.

Like Sheldrake, who “suggest[s] that what the word ‘spirituality’ seeks to express is the conscious human response to God that is both personal *and* ecclesial” (45, emphasis added), in this thesis I too have sought to show the inclusiveness of “spirituality” in religion itself, thereby greatly complicating a simple theory of one's essence being in a dichotomized relationship with a social construct. Applying a model of social construction to religious identity similar to that used for gender construction is useful to a certain extent, although it has severe limitations. For one thing, Montgomery herself seemed to have rejected such a dichotomy in her claim of her passion and Puritanism being a “blend” in her make-up. For another, in her journals, Montgomery distinctly rails against approaches to Christianity in

which the self is divided into spirit and body. It would seem that, for Montgomery, a contemporary statement such as “she was spiritual though not religious” would be misleading, as it would be incomplete and would fail to account for the nuances of Montgomery’s practice and beliefs, and her religious self-construction and identity. There is a point of similarity with theories of gender as a social construct and the one that has been presented in this thesis, however: it is acknowledged that the truth or falsity of the gendered self cannot be proved because the subject cannot be removed from the social surroundings which influence her. Similarly, in viewing Montgomery’s spiritual identity in relation to the religion which surrounded and influenced her, she cannot adequately be taken out of that context in order to analyze the degree to which her religious identity depended upon her spiritual “essence” or the social construction of the church.

Montgomery’s *Selected Journals* are admittedly not self-consciously “religious” or “spiritual” in the same ways in which conventional conversion narratives or spiritual autobiographies are. That is, it could be argued that “the” central issue in them does not focus on conversion and/or salvation from sin (although Montgomery did in fact present a non-“conversion” earlier in life, and in her final entry she cries out for forgiveness). Yet religion remains *a* central allegiance or component of Montgomery’s life story. Given the dearth of theorizing of religious identity in autobiography, there is a difficulty in proceeding with such an analysis. Can modern autobiographies be adequately studied through a religious lens when they are not self-consciously “religious” or “spiritual” as conventional spiritual autobiographies or conversion narratives are? How does one go about replacing traditional

ways of analyzing a religious text when in academia at large there is a reluctance to “do” Christian scholarship outside of religious studies or theology departments?⁶

One of the solutions to this problem is to adopt what Alan Jacobs proposes in his book; that is, to consider that Christians must continue to shape their stories when giving their testimony. In a time of severe religious doubt, Montgomery was aware of the decline in religion and faith. How could she appeal to her audience’s evolving doubting ethos while still maintaining her religious identity, one that would not merely be dismissed as a naive faith or belief? Exploring the strain of the “blend” in her “make-up,” Montgomery sought to salvage some form of faith from the onslaught of modern doubt. She constructed her “self” as an honest seeker of truth, a position of indisputable authority. Her position of seeking truth even over “orthodoxy” and *despite* her affiliation with the Presbyterian church can be seen as a strategy for protecting her truth from the forces of modern unbelief that threatened it.

As I trust this thesis has shown, the complexities of modern expressions of belief—as Montgomery’s “not unusual” (White) case illustrates—are deserving of more study and theorizing than they have hitherto been given.

⁶ For a discussion of this topic, see George M. Marsden’s *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (1997).

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