

Adaptive Interplay: L.M. Montgomery, William Shakespeare, and Virginia Woolf's Shakespearean Sister

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Virginia Woolf once speculated that “it would have been impossible, completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare. Let me imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister...” (48). Woolf then muses on the likely mental deterioration, material demise, and public ridicule of an intelligent, creative woman in the Elizabethan age (48-53). Woolf is astute in many of her observations: the lack of available historical data on women of the past to the present-day audience, the scholarly need for recovery of women's literary traditions, and the public opposition to women's artistry in various cultures of the past(and present). But in one regard, Woolf got it wrong. Shakespearean sisters --women who are kin in their literary ambitions, writers speaking women's experience in each age and through the ages-- abound. Though perhaps not as “free and unimpeded” in their art as Woolf might have hoped, women did manage to set pen to paper in the Elizabethan era (59). One need only look as far as Aphra Behn for evidence, an example not readily available to Woolf due more to the prejudices of her historical moment than Shakespeare's.¹ Even beyond these literal examples, there is another type of Shakespearean sister that Woolf anticipates, but does not locate. Woolf calls for a “supplement to history” that will inform the present ages about women's lives in the past, enriching literary and social history with the experiences of women, and illustrating the literary perspective of women whose lives and works seem historically unavailable (47). In calling for this “supplement to history,” Woolf asks contemporary scholars to reconstruct a female past, just as she imaginatively reconstructs the life of Shakespeare's sister. Numerous female writers have answered the call, stepping into the shoes of the Shakespearean sister, though not in the precise form that Woolf envisioned. These authors embody the spirit, if not the letter, of Woolf's appeal by taking the works of Shakespeare and crafting them to reflect a uniquely female perspective. Any woman writer who takes Shakespeare's works and adapts them to her own expressive purposes is, to my view, fulfilling two roles in Woolf's appeal, by creating “supplement to [literary] history,” and by reinterpreting a Shakespearean perspective with a uniquely female eye, thus creating herself as a Shakespearean sister.

For these authoresses, these metaphorically Shakespearean sisters, one may look beyond the Elizabethan age to the numerous women writers of the eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries who adapt the

characters, images, quotations, and plots from Shakespeare's plays into their own texts. These authors use the works of Shakespeare in order to inform their own acts of expression, thus incorporating Shakespearean perspectives to unique –and often gendered– ends. Shakespeare's work acts as a springboard in these more current texts, a way to engage the literary traditions of the past for comment, elaboration, repudiation, or modification. The numerous essays collected or authored by Marianne Novy demonstrate that a host of women authors engage Woolf's project to "supplement" the literary past, drawing on Shakespeare to speak their own truths...and fictions.

Surprisingly, L.M. Montgomery has yet to be adequately considered within this context. Perhaps this absence is due to the all-too-common perception that Montgomery worked solely as a "children's writer," and the equally common perception that writing texts for children precludes complex engagement with classic literary traditions, language, and theory. The consideration of Montgomery as a children's writer is, at best, limited; the belief that Montgomery's works fail to engage with literary tradition in a complex and challenging manner is grossly inaccurate.² Elizabeth Epperly's groundbreaking work on Montgomery's affiliations with Romanticism demonstrates the complicated, thorough engagement between Montgomery's texts and the literary traditions of her predecessors. *The Fragrance of Sweetgrass* also demonstrates the capacity for analyzing Montgomery's work within contemporary academic-theoretical contexts. But the interplay of Montgomery's body of work with Romanticism merely scratches the surface of her wide web of literary engagement. Rea Wilmshurst's essay, "L.M. Montgomery's Use of Quotations and Allusions in the 'Anne' Books," documents the vast wealth of Montgomery's literary referencing, in which Shakespeare plays a major role.³

Notably, Montgomery's use of Shakespeare takes a very specific shape, and in my reading, an ambivalent tone of both respect --even reverence-- and modification. An array of possible utilizations of Shakespeare, ranging widely in both technique and tone, are available to women writers as evidenced by the span of approaches utilized in *Cross-Cultural Performances: Differences in Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare*. The tone toward the source material in each case is also highly individualized. Women authors of the last few centuries may, as Novy describes it "refer to another's writings to speak one's own concerns or...refer to another's writings in order to transform them, to emphasize the difference of one's position (Novy, *Engaging*, 2). L.M. Montgomery's works enact both these projects, reinforcing the importance of Shakespeare through her adaptive borrowing, but also reforming our perceptions of Shakespeare through her method. Peter Erickson identifies this approach to Shakespearean adaptation as "a two-directional concept of the relationship between past and present," whereby works of the past

may inform present works, but works of the present also act as lenses for our re-reading of historically previous texts (2). Within this framework, a present-day reading of Montgomery's Shakespearean adaptation is temporally multidimensional, using Shakespeare to address issues of Montgomery's present day and our own, while also creating a lens to Shakespeare not only for her contemporary readers, but also for contemporary readers today. The contexts of Shakespeare's plays come to bear upon Montgomery's fictions, and her fictions as a perspective-point for reconsideration of the Shakespearean past from her time period and ours.

As to adaptive technique, Montgomery's utilization of Shakespeare is almost wholly verbal. Montgomery does not, for the most part, utilize Shakespearean characters in her works. We do not have Mirandas, Iagos, and Ariels scattered among the orphans, farm hands, and gossipy neighbors who people Avonlea.⁴ Nor do we have Shakespearean plots replayed in the rural setting, as in Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*.⁵ Montgomery seems particularly drawn to Shakespearean phrasings, the concepts they encompass, and the dramatic contexts they draw upon in creating her fiction. The complexity of such borrowing warrants a closer look at the particular ways in which Shakespeare's words echo and reverberate within the early "Anne" books, the books which show the greatest Shakespearean influence across Montgomery's prolific career.

Montgomery's verbal allusions are rarely transcribed verbatim from their sources. Rather, Montgomery slightly alters Shakespearean phraseology to create a particular effect. Two types of Shakespearean adaptation form a pattern across Montgomery's works. In the first form of adaptation, Montgomery takes Shakespearean phraseology that was originally gender-specific male or gender neutral, and shifts the wording so that the phrase applies specifically to girls or women within her novels. I term this type of borrowing a "gender shift" or "gender transformational" usage. Far more than a mere clever twist, the pattern of shifting the male Shakespearean source into a female Montgomery phraseology creates a sub-narrative around gender issues and literary tradition within Montgomery's works. The second dominant Shakespearean adaptation I observe occurs when Montgomery takes verbal moments from the tragedies, and refigures them in a specifically domestic context. If I might be forgiven a blatant act of "verbing," I term this an act of "tragifying the domestic," or in more conventional language, vesting the domestic with tragic import. As the specific usages reveal, each of these adaptations of Shakespeare within Montgomery's works serves a distinctly gendered --and literary -- end.

A notable example of the gender shift usage occurs in *Anne of Green Gables*. Anne is returning to school in autumn, and the narrator describes the scene: "There was a tang in the very air that inspired the hearts of small

maidens tripping, unlike snails, swiftly and willingly to school..." (AGG, xxiv, 190).⁶ This phrasing provides a sharp contrast with Jaques' well known "All the world's a stage" speech from *As You Like It*, when he describes a time of life wherein "the whining schoolboy" is "creeping like a snail; Unwillingly to school" (II.vii.145-7). Montgomery's adaptation transforms the gender of the subject by taking the scenario of the "schoolboy" and applying it to the "small maidens." On one level, this gender shift serves to push Shakespeare's concerns to the periphery, and instead centralize the experience of Montgomery's female characters, and by extension her female readership as well. Montgomery appropriates the content of the quotations to her characters and audience, using "classic literature" as a mechanism for the centralization of female experience in both that literature and her own. On another level, it is possible to read Montgomery's adaptation as confronting a Shakespearean assumption. Shakespeare's text uses the male experience as the standard human experience. Though Jaques' speech opens by asserting "all men and *women* merely players," the speech quickly shifts to the singular, dealing with the male experience of life as the universal: "And *one man* in his time plays many parts" (II.vii.140; II.vii.142, emphases added). This monologue opens as a discussion of universal experiences, and proceeds to use a male experience as evidence of that universal. Though Shakespeare may not endorse the content of Jaques' speech, the construction of the speech rests on an assumption of male experience as universal that was common in the Elizabethan era. Therefore, Montgomery's centralization of the female experience in the quote, and in her novels, becomes a refutation of the universality of male experience addressed in Shakespeare's work. Whether one sees this adaptation as an overtly feminist act—correcting a perceived wrong of the past by including women in the linguistic construction/perception of human experience-- or simply an act of inclusiveness whereby Montgomery draws her readers into the world of her characters by making them the focus of classic quotation, it is clear that Montgomery transforms the gender of Shakespeare's subject in order to place women at the center of the text.

In addition to shifting the gender of the subject of Jaques' speech, Montgomery transforms the tone and content of the speech as well. This act heightens the centralization of female experience within her texts, and expands the implications of her narrative strategy. While in the grim world view expressed by Jacques the "schoolboy" is "creeping like a snail; Unwillingly to school," in Montgomery's passage the girls are "tripping, unlike snails, willingly to school." Aside from turning Jaques' negative world view into a more positive one, Montgomery's text advances an argument about female education. Montgomery wrote at a time when women's access to formal education was still a hotly debated issue. Anne Shirley, one of the "small maidens" referred to

here, is a girl who earns not only a teachers' degree, but also a B.A., in the course of the Anne series. Further, Montgomery herself craved further higher education, but was forced to abandon her studies at Dalhousie University due to financial difficulties (Rubio and Waterston, 29). In this context, Montgomery's adaptation of Shakespeare has an additional function. Her modification suggests that girls and women, given the opportunity to be educated, will pursue this education with an unprecedented enthusiasm. The Shakespearean model, where the males are dragging themselves "unwillingly" to their studies, contrasts sharply with the quick, enthusiastic girls of Montgomery's writing. By transforming both the gender and the tone of the original quotation, Montgomery's text makes a timely argument about the importance of female education, as well as centralizing the female experience in her texts. In this role as a reviser of Shakespeare, Montgomery demonstrates herself a true Shakespearean sister by taking the words and sentiments of Shakespeare's day, and re-presenting them with an overtly female perspective.

This example is not isolated within the body of Montgomery's works.⁷ The frequency with which Montgomery takes a Shakespearean quotation and modifies it to reflect a specifically female experiences suggests a pattern of adaptation throughout the novels that reinforces each of the themes seen in the previous usage: the centralization of female experience in both writerly and readerly senses, the questioning of Elizabethan assumptions of male experience as universal, and the argument in favor of female education within Montgomery's time period. These issues are particularly at stake in *Anne of the Island*, the book in which Anne herself attends University and earns her degree. In a chapter entitled "Full-fledged B.A.'s," Anne sits with friends Phil and Stella, all about to graduate, reflecting back upon their collegiate years. The following exchange occurs:

"...can you realize that our Redmond life is almost over?"

"I can't" said Anne, sorrowfully. "It seems just yesterday that Pris and I were alone in that crowd of Freshmen at Redmond. And now we are Seniors in our final examinations."

"Potent, wise, and reverend Seniors," quoted Phil. (AotI, xxxvii, 212).

Phil adapts her quotation from *Othello*, specifically Othello's defense against the accusation that he has lured Desdemona from her father. Othello opens his speech with the following address: "Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors; My very noble and approved good masters" (I.iii.76-7). The first effect of this quotation is that Phil demonstrates her classical education, and her ability to incorporate it into daily conversation. Shakespeare is at-the-ready in her verbal repertoire, marking her as a well-educated woman, and indicating that the very education under discussion hasn't been wasted. Indeed, her witty verbal play with the Shakespearean source --punning on

“signiors”-- is a verbal maneuver of which Shakespeare himself might have been proud. But this textual moment is also another example of the gender shift adaptation, and serves many of the same functions as the example of the “small maidens.” Montgomery takes a phrase that previously addresses a group of men, the “signiors,” and uses it to describe a group of women, these “seniors.” But while in the “small maidens” example Montgomery formed a contrast between the reluctant schoolboy and the eager schoolgirls, in this case Montgomery draws a comparison as well as a contrast. Othello addresses a group of men who have status and power in their community. The adapted quotation likens the young women of Montgomery’s novel to these men. Wittingly or not, Phillippa is voicing the view that these educated women will take positions of power in their communities upon graduation. The status of the graduating girls, the “full-fledged B.A.s,” is correlated to the status of the “noble and approved good masters” in the Shakespearean play. But in making this correlation, a contrast is presented as well, to those who have knowledge of the source text. Through the adapted quotation and its resultant comparison, we are invited to envision the world run by these women in opposition to the world run by the men of *Othello*. While the girls of Montgomery’s novel are “wise,” and prudent in their considerations as they discuss their past and future, the Shakespearean scene is a scene of false accusation, which foreshadows Othello’s later false accusation regarding his wife’s fidelity. These accusations, made from scant evidence, eventually lead to far-reaching personal, familial, and political undoing. Thus we see the decided contrast between the thoughtful, reflective girls in the parlour and the men whose rash decisions produce catastrophic consequences. Montgomery’s adaptation opens the door to rereading *Othello* as a play that highlights the arbitrariness of male rule.

This point is reinforced by another slight alteration in the wording of the original quotation, whereby the “grave...signiors” of Othello’s speech become the “wise...Seniors” of Phil’s speech. While the men in the play are “grave” --a word that denotes both their somberness and their willingness to kill-- the women in Montgomery’s novel are “wise.” This alteration in wording suggests that the female “Seniors” would make wiser rulers than the “grave signiors.”

In the episode which follows this paraphrase in *Anne of the Island*, the women relate the various life lessons they have learned during their school years. Their house matron, who very vocally opposes female education early in the novel, draws the following conclusion from their words: “...the sum and substance is that you can learn --if you’ve got natural gumption enough-- in four years at college what it would take about twenty years of living to teach you. Well, that justifies higher education in my opinion” (AotI, xxxviii, 214). Aunt Jimsie clearly endorses

female education through her statements, but also makes important observations about life lessons that relate back to the Shakespearean reference. The text hints at the possibility that educated women rulers would not make the same “grave” errors that the male rulers of Shakespeare’s plays make. While Desdemona’s father and Othello have to lose Desdemona before they can discover their misrule and learn their lessons, Montgomery’s heroines have learned equivalent life lessons in “four years at college.” Montgomery’s paraphrase speaks directly to the issue of centralizing women’s experiences in government, as well as education and literature. Thus, by drawing on a Shakespearean source, Montgomery can use the context of Shakespeare to create a second contextual layer for the discussions within her novels. Suddenly Phil, Anne, Stella, and Jimsie are not simply discussing the four girls at hand, but are discussing matters at stake in Shakespeare as well: proper government, proper rule, the importance of education, and the larger implications of good personal judgement. As such, Montgomery’s text simultaneously use a Shakespearean context to enrich their own commentary, while also commenting back upon the Shakespearean plays from which they draw. Through the gender shift, Montgomery’s novel suggests the ways in which Shakespeare’s plays might have gone differently --and better-- had they placed women’s experience at their core.

The gender shift adaptation has important implications for the audience of the text, as well as the issues conveyed within the text itself. In addition to making arguments about women’s education and ability to rule, Phil’s quote from Othello centralizes women’s experience both textually and extra-textually, both publicly and privately. Othello’s speech is outwardly referential, defending himself against the accusing “signors.” Phil’s adapted quotation is inwardly referential, referring to herself and her friends, the “Seniors.” With this shift in the audience addressed from outward to inward and from male to female, Montgomery centralizes the experiences of women IN the novel, but also the woman reader. The intertextual moment becomes an extra-textual moment, whereby Othello addressing a male audience is transformed into Phil addressing a female one. This female audience exists within the novel, but also outside the novel, among its readership. Thus the female readers of Montgomery, though not the exclusive audience for her text, are drawn into a unique textual relationship whereby their experience as female readers is deemed central, valid, and important, the same way that the female experience of the characters is reclaimed for centrality by Montgomery’s paraphrases. While in the “small maidens” example, centralization was achieved through the voice of an omniscient narrator referring to a group of girls, here the gender shift, and its accompanying power shift, comes through the voice of one of the female characters. The women depicted in the novel now participate in the shift from margin to center through the Shakespearean adaptation. In this case, the shift

is achieved not only through the change in gender in the paraphrased quotation, but also through the gender shift in speaker and audience. This textual maneuver recreates Montgomery's gender shift usage so that its implications are not limited to the characters within the novel, but restructure the relationship between character and reader, and the gender implications resonant on each level: within the text, in the space between reader and text, and in the social space of the reader outside the text. By transforming the scene of *Othello* from one of a man addressing men to one of women addressing women, the women become the speakers, the spoken-of, and the listeners in/outside the text. Thus the gender shift adaptation bears implications for the relationship of woman to text on every level of the textual relationship, and suggests the centrality of women in each of these potential roles.

While Phil draws on a tragedy for her adapted quotation, the majority of the gender-shift quotations in Montgomery are drawn from Shakespeare's comedies, including *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*, and several references from *As You Like It*, with the most decidedly transformational of these references coming from the latter two plays. It seems significant that Shakespearean works that themselves play with constructions of gender are the ones from which Montgomery draws her best material for gender transformational usage. Perhaps this utilization is a signal that Montgomery recognized the potential of Shakespeare's plays to speak to gender issues. It is through this relationship that we can recognize not only Montgomery's reformations of Shakespeare to her own ends, but her affirmations of Shakespeare as well.

Anne of Avonlea provides one such example, evidenced in the following line: "'Some are born old maids, some achieve old maidenhood, and some have old maidenhood thrust upon them,' parodied Miss Lavendar whimsically" (AA, xxiii, 202). In this scene, Miss Lavendar is lightly playing with her status as an "old maid" through Shakespearean quotation, drawn from the letter to Malvolio in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. In this play, a servant is lead to believe that his female employer is enamored of him, and has sent him a letter that reads: "...be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em" (II.v.141-3). Miss Lavendar transfers the terms of male "greatness" onto herself, mocking both the notion of male "greatness" expressed in the letter and the traditional stigma of spinsterhood in the process. Though the gender shifts, the effect is subtly different than in the previous examples. In this context, Miss Lavendar's mockery replicates rather than transforming the themes from the source play. Both *Twelfth Night* and this scene from *Anne of Avonlea* poke fun at the ambitions traditionally ascribed to each gender. *Anne of Avonlea* achieves this effect by centralizing the experience of a delightful spinster, and ridiculing the notion that "old maidenhood" is a forced rather

than chosen condition. This idea is confirmed by Anne's subsequent comment: "You are one of those who have achieved it then...if every old maid were like you they would come into fashion" (AA, xxiii, 202). The gender shift still centralizes women's experience, and in so doing, questions traditional power structures that assign marital ambitions to women and political ambitions to men. But unlike previous quotations, this theme is supported by the Shakespearean original.

The function of the letter to Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* is to mock his ambitions, his aspiration to marry a woman of high social rank and obtain power and status through this alliance. In *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio's desired match, Olivia, represents political power, while the male figure Malvolio represents ambition to marry. Like Miss Lavendar's paraphrase, the play undermines the idea that marriage aspirations are exclusively a woman's sphere, while political success is exclusively male. *Twelfth Night* also addresses the precariousness of gender roles by depicting a woman who assumes the identity of a man through cross-dressing. While we would scarcely see a drag queen in a Montgomery novel, the message that Miss Lavendar has crossed gender roles by remaining an independent woman (to this point in the novel) accords with both the adapted quotation and its original. So in this instance, the gender shift reinforces a theme from the earlier play: That there is a vast, ambiguous middle ground between the ambitions of men and the ambitions of women, and neither is wholly public nor private in nature. This example illustrates that Montgomery's use of the gender transformational quotation serves not only to critique Shakespeare's texts, but also to re-emphasize themes already at work in Shakespeare's plays. Thus Montgomery in one instance may critique or re-evaluate Shakespeare through her borrowing, while in another she may use the identical technique to focus the lens upon Shakespeare, drawing on his work in an admiring way, to emphasize themes already present in the original. Montgomery is still centralizing the experience of women with her usage, but in this case she is permitting us to read Shakespeare through her interpretive use. Montgomery's works act as mediators. They draw upon plays that already deconstruct notions of gender identity and gendered power structures, and highlight these qualities in the earlier plays through their re-presentation. Through this usage, it is possible to read new meaning into Shakespeare's works through the lens Montgomery provides, in addition to transforming Shakespeare's works to speak to the issues of Montgomery's, and our, present day.

To sum up the gender transformational usage, Montgomery takes phrases applied to men in Shakespeare's texts and applies them to women. This treatment of Shakespeare's works serves several functions within the Anne novels. One function is to centralize the experiences of girls and women within Montgomery's texts. This

treatment, in turn, permits Montgomery's female readers to be validated by seeing their own experiences as central rather than marginal in their societies and their literatures. Another purpose of this gender transformation is to argue in favor of women's education. In addition, the gender shift can serve to critique male power and its abuse. The gender switch broadens the scope of women's possible literary and social roles by critiquing the stereotypes of spinsters and flighty, uncommitted schoolgirls, as well as the social structures that perpetuate those stereotypes. Finally, Montgomery's use of the gender shift restructures the relationship between text and female reader, by taking the implications of the gender shift *within* the text, and broadening them outward to recast women not only as central subjects for literature, but as creators, speakers, readers, and listeners as well. Montgomery broadens the role of women both within and outside the text, by creating extra-textual implications through her inter-textual narrative style.

In addition to all of the functions that gender adaptation serves for Montgomery's texts, it serves a function for Shakespeare's texts as well. By taking her material from works of Shakespeare that already address issues of gender and power, Montgomery confirms the possibility of reading Shakespeare in a woman-centered context. Montgomery's texts act as woman-centered mediators of Shakespeare's works. Her novels create new contexts for rereading "classic" texts that are contemporary and often gender-specific, while still actively engaging the issues and themes of the original texts themselves, both within and outside their historical contexts. Thus Montgomery simultaneously questions, transforms, and pays tribute to Shakespeare's works through her adaptation of them.

In addition to the gender shift method of adaptation, Montgomery's works also illustrate a second adaptive technique. The gender shift quotations draw largely on Shakespeare's comedies. Montgomery also draws upon the Shakespearean tragedy, though this adaptation serves a slightly different function, and produces a varied effect to that of the gender shift. In this second narrative technique, Montgomery takes phrases from Shakespearean tragedy and applies them within a domestic context. This technique serves several functions. It elevates the domestic sphere within Montgomery's novels by equating it with the grand scale of the Shakespearean tragedy. The troubles of everyday people in rural settings are paralleled with the tragic circumstances of royal characters, creating a likeness between them. Yet in so doing, Montgomery also questions the nature of tragedy, since her borrowings tend to use tragic circumstances to comic effect. For Shakespeare's work, Montgomery's technique creates the possibility for rereading the tragedies less as political sagas than as domestic tales. In some cases, her adaptation even permits us to see the comedy within the tragedy, through her recreation. The interplay of these effects, on both

Montgomery's works and Shakespeare's own, creates a new sense of genre whereby the domestic, the tragic, and the comic are no longer separable in issues of plot, character, theme, or literary style, but instead form a new hybrid category to which both Montgomery's works and Shakespeare's works belong, reinforcing Montgomery's status as a Shakespearean sister.

It may be useful to address the extent to which Montgomery's works might be considered "domestic" at the outset. "Domestic" often takes on a pejorative connotation, either by indicating women's confinement to a private sphere (in literature and/or life), or through the critical dismissal of domestic literature by its association with supposed "female" concerns --home, family, relationships-- that are in turn deemed less valuable than the public concerns of work, government, and education that may be associated with the male sphere. Since I have already established my belief that Montgomery's work concerns itself closely with issues of education and government, as well as other public concerns, I would not consider her work exclusively domestic in scope. Montgomery's works do not take place wholly within the home, nor necessarily reinforce traditional notions of family life. For what do you call an orphan living with a brother-sister pair if not an unconventionally structured family? Yet Montgomery's work does tend to focus on small-town life, intimate circles of family and friends, and a setting that places emphasis on the importance of home. Indeed, each Anne novel is named for the place Anne calls home within the book. Through this combination of qualities, Montgomery's texts could be called "domestic" in a certain sense. Montgomery's work elevates the importance of home, even as it supports a broader role for women in the world. Thus I will use the term "domestic" as applied to Montgomery's work to acknowledge this emphasis on home, home life, and relationship concerns, though I do not see her works embracing other concepts of "the domestic," such as confinement to the private sphere, or the strict categorization of certain behaviors as "female" or "male" defined in other literary and social debates. Thus, I use the term "domestic," but with a desire to redefine this term according to Montgomery's works, and not confine her works within potentially pejorative terminology.

The following example indicates how Montgomery takes material from the tragedies and transfers it to the domestic sphere. In *Anne of the Island*, Anne describes the experience at her new college boarding house, including her house-mother's affection for handmade cushions:

"Miss Ada's cushions are really getting on my nerves," said Anne. "She finished two new ones last week, stuffed and embroidered within an inch of their lives. There being absolutely no other cushionless place to put them she stood them up against the wall on the stair landing. They topple

over half the time and if we come up or down the stairs in the dark we fall over them. Last Sunday, when Dr. Davis prayed for all those exposed to the perils of the sea, I added in thought ‘and for all those who live in houses where cushions are loved not wisely but too well!’” (AotI, vi, 44).

Anne equates her life in a be-cushioned house with a tragedy in two ways. First, Anne draws a parallel between herself and “those exposed to the perils of the sea.” Through this action of Anne’s, this domestically tragic episode is likened to adventure fiction and/or tragic drama. As with Philippa’s address to her fellow Seniors, Anne takes a prayer directed outward, and turns it to address herself, and others who share her experience. Through this action, Anne’s own experience is centralized in the text, and by extension, female experience in general. Further, this act of equating tripping on a cushion to seafaring dangers has several potential narrative effects. It heightens the drama of Anne’s cushion episode, by correlating it to a sea adventure. Yet it simultaneously renders Anne’s actions more comic, by emphasizing the gap between her quasi-tragedy and the potential actual tragedy of drowning. Yet again, Anne’s comparison questions the importance of the “perils of the sea” as set against the perils of daily life. For her example suggests the possibility that the perils of daily life, including the domestic strife of an uncomfortable living situation produced by a lack of economic means, may be every bit as real, and as trying, as the difficulties of life aboard ship. In creating this possibility, Montgomery’s fiction centralizes the experiences of her readers, who are far more likely to encounter an overzealous landlady, a haphazard trip on the stairs, or a personal conflict with someone in their home, than a fight with a wayward octopus or a stab at an elusive white whale.⁸ Here, Montgomery glosses the genres of adventure fiction and sermon as well as the tragedy. She transforms the genres to her own ends by taking their phraseology, applying it to her female characters, and thus appropriating it for her own use. In this instance, though the effect is still potentially a gendered one, emphasizing the domestic over the seafaring/tragic, the effect extends to all of Montgomery’s readers regardless of gender. She “tragifies” the domestic in order to render it comic, but in so doing, she paradoxically elevates the importance of the everyday person’s experience of life, placing it on par with the exceptional life of the adventure novel. The adventure novel itself becomes diminished in importance through this narrative technique, because Montgomery forces us to recognize its comic potential.

But it is important to remember from whence this adaptation came. When Anne quips, “not wisely but too well,” she is quoting from Shakespeare’s *Othello*. In this play, the title character murders his wife Desdemona for

her supposed infidelity, a supposition that later proves wholly false. After both the murder and the subsequent discovery of his wife's innocence, Othello makes the following speech:

...I pray you, in your letters
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak
Of one that loved not wisely, but too well... (V.ii.336-40).

Anne takes the language of the tragedy and applies it to her own condition, thus putting the tragic into a domestic context. While it may seem extreme to equate the grief of a man who repents the murder of his wife with the hassle of living in a house with too many cushions, Montgomery's text blurs the boundaries of tragic drama and domestic fiction through her borrowing. Thus Anne's frustrations, though comedic, are rendered real and valid. While tragedy is vested with great import in the literary world, domestic fiction is often dismissed. Through her adoption of a mock-tragic tone, Montgomery is able to close the gap between these genres, and therefore question their varied placements within the literary world. Investing the domestic sphere with the language and emotional dimensions of the tragedy, Montgomery centralizes the importance of daily, domestic life, in contrast to the emphasis on royal and political life so often touted in Shakespeare. So the fusing of the genre realms, tragic and domestic, also bridges a social class boundary within the lives of Montgomery's readers, suggesting that the tragedy of the woman in the home is on the same level as the tragic hero of social/military rank.

An added dimension to Anne's borrowing is found in the source passage. Othello himself pleads for a sympathetic portrayal in print, and likewise a sympathetic interpretation by readers and viewers. He offers his own interpretation of his events as "unlucky" and a product of "love," rather than the more harsh, though perhaps equally accurate, depiction of Othello as a jealous murderer who takes the life of an innocent woman through his own vanity. Othello asks writers to "speak of me as I am," requesting veracity, but also an adherence to his (and possibly Shakespeare's) interpretation of events. Since Montgomery adapts the passage to her own use, she dismisses Othello's plea in favor of Anne's, rejecting the request that Othello makes within the play. Through this action, Montgomery casts herself as an interpreter of Othello's plight, but as an interpreter that sets her own reality before Othello's. Montgomery casts off the male protagonist in favor of the female protagonist, offering not only a new reading of Othello through Anne, but by extension, a new reading of Othello through Desdemona. Recall that Anne

directs her prayer toward “all those who live in houses where cushions are loved not wisely but too well.” Anne is not sympathizing with those “who love not wisely but too well,” but rather reserves her sympathy for those who live with these unwise lovers. Montgomery’s adaptation shifts the focus from the lovers to their victims. True, the effect is somewhat comedic in Montgomery’s rendering. But it carries a serious undertone when compared with the source material, especially when one recalls the method of Desdemona’s murder: Smothering with a bed cushion. Thus Montgomery provides a new context for reading *Othello* that downplays the role of Othello himself and highlights the role of Desdemona, as the character who truly suffers from Othello’s unwise love. Montgomery offers a woman-centered reading of *Othello* through her woman-centered paraphrase of the play. Moreover, the uneasy presence of sinister behavior beneath Anne’s light quotation, the tense reminder that cushions can truly serve murderous purposes, serves to further conflate the genres of comedy, tragedy, and domestic that initially seem so disparate.

Montgomery’s appropriation of tragic language permits her to argue for the importance of women’s experiences, the importance of everyday life, and the importance of domestic fiction as a genre. In so doing, she creates a possibility for rereading Shakespeare in new terms. By bringing aspects of the tragedy into the domestic sphere, Montgomery offers the possibility of reading Shakespeare’s tragedies as domestic conflicts, without diminishing the importance of these conflicts. Even though the characters of *Othello* are often read as political figures, Montgomery’s treatment highlights the fact that they are also members of families. Regardless of the social standing of the characters, we may now read their conflicts as essentially domestic ones, using the domestic lens provided by Montgomery. I *do not* suggest this treatment in any way diminishes the moral or emotional significance of these conflicts. On the contrary, the significance of the personal weight of these events is equal to or greater than their political significance when read through the domestic lens. While this treatment centralizes the importance of women, as already seen, it also neutralizes the difference in class between the royal characters presented in Shakespearean tragedy and the rural community members presented in Montgomery’s fiction. If Othello’s dilemma is cast primarily as a domestic one, then the significance of other domestic conflicts is on par with the significance of Othello’s domestic conflict, regardless of the social or political status of the characters involved. In this way, Montgomery’s fiction acts as a mediator of Shakespeare that permits her readers, both male and female, to feel that their lives are equal in significance with the lives of tragic royal figures, epic heroes and heroines of great dramas. So though Montgomery transforms Shakespeare’s texts to highlight the experiences of women and everyday people

in the rural setting, she also casts Shakespeare's texts as speaking the experiences of her contemporary audience. Anyone can be an Othello, or a Desdemona. A great fate, or a tragic one, or a comic one, or an uneasy combination of the three, lies not in the status or gender of the characters, but rather in their circumstances. Therefore, by incorporating tragic phraseology into a domestic context, Montgomery questions the class, gender, and genre boundaries which potentially divide Shakespeare's works and her own.

So again, Montgomery's narrative technique has multifold effects. It diminishes the traditional elevation of the tragedy above the normal. It elevates the importance of everyday domestic life, and the domestic genre. It centralizes the experiences of everyday people, particularly women, in both Shakespeare's works and Montgomery's own. It yields a more sympathetic, domestic, and woman-centered interpretation of Shakespeare's plays. It calls attention to our placement of sympathy both as readers, and also in the outside world, by its depiction of genuine social problems --whether life-and-death or merely uncomfortable-- and its reconstruction of our sympathy within those observations. It reconstructs the relationship of reader to text. Finally, it uses comic technique to blur the boundaries between tragedy, adventure, domestic, and comic, disclosing the humor that resides even within tragic events, and also the tragedy that may lie beneath a humorous rendering of the domestic.

Another example of Montgomery's appropriation of the tragic into the domestic occurs in *Anne of the Island*, when Anne is on vacation from school. Her friend Jane is spending the night, and while lying in bed sharing late-night confidences, Jane inquires idly whether Anne would be interested in marrying Jane's brother Billy. Anne's reflections are described:

Was it a dream? Was it one of those nightmare things in which you find yourself engaged or married to someone you hate or don't know, without the slightest idea how it ever came about? No, she, Anne Shirley was lying there, wide awake, in her own bed, and Jane Andrews was beside her, calmly proposing for her brother Billy. Anne did not know whether she wanted to writhe or laugh. (AotI, viii, 58).

After Anne refuses the proposal, the subsequent narration explains: "To sleep Jane went easily and speedily; but, though very unlike Macbeth in most other respects, she had certainly contrived to murder sleep for Anne. That proposed-to damsel lay on a wakeful pillow...but her meditations were far from being romantic" (AotI, viii, 60).

As with the Othelloish cushions, it is potentially extreme to compare a grisly, cold-blooded political murder with the discomfort of receiving a proposal "by proxy" (AotI, viii, 60). Here again, Montgomery takes the language

surrounding a murder and applies it in a domestic context, not to detract from the gravity of the murder itself, but to create a multifold textual effect. First, the transfer of the tragic into the domestic creates a humorous effect. The image of Anne lying awake, pondering how she had come to a place where her friends were proposing in their brothers' stead, is funny. The notion of plain Jane snoring away while dreamy Anne ponders her shattered illusions of betrothal (literarily influenced illusions at that) is downright hilarious. While the situation is funny unto itself, part of its humor may be derived from the perceived gap between the tragic and the domestic, the proposed comparison between Duncan's murder, Lady Macbeth's insane somnambulism, Macbeth's insomnia, and Anne's own sleeplessness. But simultaneously, perhaps paradoxically, the same literary technique also closes the gap between the genres, producing two additional effects on the texts in question. By equating Anne with the sleepless characters of Macbeth (one dead, two guilt-stricken), Montgomery draws a correlation between the texts themselves. In so doing, she is able to mock the tragedy, potentially wresting it from its perceived narrative power. Are Shakespearean characters *really* so sympathetic, when they bring evil down upon themselves? Are the sufferings of murderers after a murder *really* worth our attention, when there are exams to pass, marriages to plan, houses to buy, and books to write? While Montgomery herself might answer "yes," at the same time, her narrative technique calls into question the arbitrary placement of tragic drama above everyday life. Montgomery elevates her own quasi-tragic, comic-domestic narrative, by infusing its characters' everyday circumstances with the import given to the tragedy. The cumulative effect of each of these sub-effects is once again the conflation of the genres of tragedy, comedy, and domestic. By incorporating tragic language into the domestic context, Montgomery's texts demonstrate that daily events of contemporary life are of equal importance with the political maneuverings of nobility from a remote past. Because Montgomery's fiction centralizes the importance of the everyday person's story alongside the importance of tales of the upper class, her fiction can be read on the same level as the tragic drama. Montgomery's usage reinforces the interconnectedness of tragedy and domestic fiction, enabling the reader to see domestic events as tragedies and tragedies as domestic events. Further, by adding a comedic dimension, Montgomery's fiction helps us to recognize that every life will have both public and private, both tragic and comic elements, and that it is the combination of these forces that make for richly layered narrative and richly layered life. Notably, Shakespeare too had a skill for recognizing the inherent comedy within the tragedy, and the tragic note within the comic tale. Again, Montgomery's borrowing both adapts Shakespeare's texts to her own ends, but does so in a way that ultimately highlights the similarities between the two. Her usage is reformative, yes, but not

necessarily dismissive. She recreates her own characters as Shakespearean in grand scale, while ordinary in all other respects, and it is this synthesis that lends power to her narrative technique.

As was the case with *Othello*, and so again with *Macbeth*, Montgomery creates a context where the earlier play can be re-evaluated through the domestic sphere. Through this lens, *Macbeth* becomes less a political tragedy than a tragedy of families, and of husbands and wives. Anne's refusal of an undesirable proposal takes its language from a play that demonstrates the destructiveness that can grow out of marriage. This intertextuality provides both support for Anne's decision to refuse Billy, and a context for reading *Macbeth* as a play about bad marriages. Once again, Montgomery has turned away from the male protagonist in her adaptation. While Lady Macbeth is often viewed as the prompter of violence in *Macbeth*, in Montgomery's adaptation, it is the woman (Anne) who must be wary of the bad marriage. Through this treatment, Montgomery equates Lady Macbeth with Anne to Lady Macbeth's advantage. With both *Macbeth* and *Othello*, Montgomery's domestic context makes it possible to reread Shakespeare with greater emphasis on, and empathy for, the wives portrayed in these plays. By shifting the schema of sympathy in the tragedy from the regretful, grieving tragic hero to the literal victims of his violence, as well as the figurative victims --the women whose lives, loves, and households are destroyed by the actions of the tragic hero-- Montgomery creates a female-centered, domestic reading of the earlier plays that in turn reinforces the scope of her own fiction.

L.M. Montgomery's uses of Shakespeare serve a function for her contemporary audience. Her adaptations centralize the experiences of women and middle-class citizens, confirming the importance of their experiences on a grand scale. Montgomery offers us a rereading of Shakespeare's works, altering the emphases and contexts of the plays, and suggesting that every political tragedy is, perhaps, a domestic tragedy at heart. This technique makes it possible to understand Shakespeare's plays in a new light, both within Montgomery's time and beyond. But Montgomery's adaptations of Shakespeare also have implications for our present-day audience. Her gender shift adaptations deny a male standard for universal experience, highlighting the importance of women in any understanding of human behavior. In addition, Montgomery's use of the tragedy in a domestic context speaks to present-day issues of feminism and genre. Montgomery highlights the importance of women's social issues in the Shakespearean texts, and offers a full portrayal of women's lives --tragic, domestic, and comic in dimension-- in her own. Montgomery problematizes the genre categories of tragedy, comedy, and domestic, and questions the distinctions drawn between these areas through her narrative technique. Her fusion of potentially disparate genres

points out the possibility of literature breaking the bounds of genre categorization, and redefining itself and our notions of genre in the process. Finally, by acting as a mediator of Shakespeare's works both to her contemporary audience and to the present day, Montgomery's texts point out the potential for past literatures to express the complexities of modern-day life. Montgomery's adaptations communicate ideas about Shakespeare, ideas about Montgomery herself, ideas about the periods in which both authors function, and ultimately about the context in which we now exist. Accomplishing each of these tasks through a woman-centered perspective, Montgomery demonstrates that she is, indeed, that which Woolf could not find in her quest for literary women. She is a Shakespearean sister.

NOTES

¹ Marianne Novy's *Engaging with Shakespeare* addresses Behn, and a variety of other women writers from the same era, in its discussion of gender and writing in the Elizabethan period (9-10).

² For further discussion on genre classifications of Montgomery's work, particularly her consideration as a children's writer, see Reimer's Introduction to *Such a Simple Little Tale*, esp 4-7, Mary Rubio's excellent Introduction to *Harvesting Thistles: The Textual Garden of L.M. Montgomery*. The spread of essays in these volumes is also useful in recognizing the precariousness of genre classification for Montgomery's work.

³ One might question whether Montgomery's readers are now, or were in her day, cognizant of her literary referencing. Research indicates that many readers, regardless of age or gender considerations, had the potential for working familiarity with Shakespearean references through school study, public recitation/performance, and/or the currency of Shakespearean quotation in the common cultural lexicon. This effect is heightened by Montgomery's frequent cueing of oncoming quotation in text. Even without conscious authorial craft or reader recognition, however, many of the effects of Montgomery's literary adaptation remain potent. For more on women's Shakespearean literacy in the nineteenth century, see Novy, *Engaging*, 3. For more on the role of recitation in public schools and communities in Montgomery's time period, see Jones.

⁴ I do see a Shakespearean significance in Anne Shirley's frequent use of the name "Cordelia" in her fantasies and writings, but other forms of Shakespearean borrowing are much more pervasive and patterned in Montgomery's work.

⁵ Smiley's use of the plot of *King Lear* within *A Thousand Acres* is widely known. For some of her own commentary on this adaptation, see Smiley's essay in *Transforming Shakespeare*.

⁶ Montgomery's texts are quoted with the standard novellic abbreviation and chapter number, as well as the page number of the particular edition used. Thus *Anne of Green Gables* appears AGG, *Anne of the Island* is AotI, and so on. Shakespearean quotations are cited using standard act, scene, and line number notation. All Shakespearean quotations provided stem from Wilmshurst's initial discovery, verified and elaborated using the Signet Classic editions of Shakespeare's plays.

⁷ Considering only the Anne novels, Montgomery uses a gender shift in no fewer than eleven of her Shakespearean adaptations. She applies the Shakespearean tragic to the domestic context twenty-one times. Only eight Shakespearean references fall outside these two categories, of which six are used verbatim from the original plays.

⁸ As my choice of comparisons (Verne and Melville) indicates, I believe that Montgomery twits the conventions of the seafaring novel through her comic use of tragic terminology. I do not, however, see Montgomery as mocking nor underestimating the actual dangers of seafaring. Having lived in maritime regions, and including many maritimers among her readership, it seems unlikely that Montgomery would belittle ocean-based professions. This does not, however, preclude the possibility that she strove to depict the domestic as of equal importance. During her own time at University, for example, Montgomery won an award for a comical letter in which she mocks men who "storm and scold" while failing miserably at simple domestic duties (*Selected Journals I*, 157).

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