# Heartstopping Moments: Rainbow Joy, Queering Spaces, and Shaping Futurities in L.M. Montgomery's Anne and Emily Novels

DOI
https://doi.org/10.32393/jlmms/2025.0020
Published on
Mon, 05/05/2025 - 16:00

Queer joy is a ticket to a journey back to the future. In L.M. Montgomery's *Anne* and *Emily* novels from *Rainbow Valley* onward and Alice Oseman's *Heartstopper* books/Netflix adaptations, the queering of timelines and spaces for young people has the potential to nurture and be nurtured by rainbow or queer joy—the kind of joy that comes from transforming trauma into healing, the privileging of uniqueness into the valuing of differences and (inter)connections, and fixedness into personal and political becoming—by subverting conventional narrative patterns and tropes associated with queerness. Questions arise when Montgomery's queer or marginalized characters reach adulthood as to whether queerness can sustain the joyful, heartstopping moments of their youth and shape the futurities that Oseman's multiverses predict.

In the final chapter of *Emily of New Moon*, Emily emphatically states to Mr. Carpenter that she "want[s] rainbow joy—lots of it" (401). Drawing on Sara Ahmed's critique of "the promise of happiness" and her theories of "orientations," "desire lines," and possibilities, and Rosi Braidotti's "ethics of joy" as it relates to "*potentia*" and "back-casting," this paper explores how the joy, retreats, and sense of futurities in L.M. Montgomery's later *Anne* novels (*Rainbow Valley*, *Rilla of Ingleside*, and *The Blythes Are Quoted*) and the *Emily* trilogy align—and do not align—with the queer joy, safe spaces, and projections of futurities in contemporary young-adult (YA) queer

representations. These contemporary representations are well exemplified by Alice Oseman's *Heartstopper* graphic novels and Netflix adaptations and Canadian YA author and Montgomery scholar Benjamin Lefebvre's *In the Key of Dale* with its overt allusions to *Heartstopper* and *Emily of New Moon*. Oseman's novels (including her prequel, coquel, and sequel images and books) and television adaptations are widely and highly regarded for their impact on expanding queer representation and possibilities in the context of queer joy as a political force to counter cynicism and despair in the face of social and psychological challenges without resorting to easy promises of easy happiness. As Kelley Robinson declared in her speech for the Human Rights Campaign on 1 February 2025, which honoured Joe Locke for his activism and his role as Charlie Spring in Netflix's *Heartstopper*, among all the organization's political and legal actions is another essential action: courageously "lifting up stories that matter" as one way "to make community out of all the chaos."1

While the earlier Montgomery *Anne* books have elements of queerness—the destabilizing of norms related to binarized gender, sex, and sexuality and the consequent valuing of process and opening up of possibilities that challenge and deviate from these norms—only in the later *Anne* books are the longer-term implications of this destabilizing witnessed at both the individual character and collective social levels, the microcosm and the macrocosm. And, I will argue, it is only in these later *Anne* novels and the *Emily* trilogy that the misleading and misdirecting "promise of happiness," as critiqued by Ahmed, is tested and found wanting because it thwarts the possibilities that come with leaning into moments akin to Oseman's heartstopping moments, which are pivotal moments of potential radical transformation. In the conclusion of *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed contends that when joy and happiness are not conflated (214), "[p]ossibility means grasping terror as well as joy" (219).2 Montgomery's rainbow valleys may cultivate happiness, but they impede experiencing and attaining the joy of climbing the hill—Emily's (and Montgomery's) "Alpine Path"—and participating in shaping a new world, a new order. Pursuing oblique paths, which heartstopping moments reveal and along which heartstopping moments such as those that Oseman incorporates into her prose and graphics can be experienced, fosters a queer joy that destabilizes time and negotiates multiverses of possibility without collapsing into the chaos.

In Montgomery's novels and Oseman's books/Netflix adaptations, the queering of timelines and spaces for young people has the potential to nurture and be nurtured

by rainbow or queer joy—the kind of joy that comes from transforming trauma into healing, the privileging of uniqueness into the valuing of differences and (inter)connections, and fixedness into personal and political becoming—by subverting conventional narrative patterns and tropes associated with queerness. While there are various contexts these transformations are represented within, I will focus on the microcosm of biological and/or chosen family and the macrocosms of natural, artistic, and digital spaces to examine how questions arise when Montgomery's queer or marginalized characters reach adulthood as to whether queerness can sustain the joyful, heartstopping moments of their youth and shape the futurities that Oseman's multiverses predict. Whereas for Heather Love "the politics of queer history" is "feeling backward" to "loss" (the title of her book), which is the kind of loss felt in and dominating the later *Anne* books, in Montgomery's *Emily* trilogy and Oseman's *Heartstopper* oeuvre, "feeling backward" is reclamation, recovery, and transformation of a reconfigured community and individuals who are healing rather than capitulating to the threat of chaos. Queer joy is a ticket to a journey back to the future.

**What Makes Joy Queer?**

"Queer joy" is a term that emerged at the end of the twentieth century, along with "Black joy" and "Indigenous joy,"[3] as a theoretical reaction to the negative tropes and narratives attached to marginalized groups and as a political praxis—"collective practices of change" (Braidotti, "Joy" 222)—challenging these conventions. Queer joy is different from joy itself in that, like queerness more generally, it has the potential to be a form of resistance, inspiring repair, reclamation, and/or transformation of what currently exists. Like any kind of "transformative criticism," as Love writes in *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, "[a] central paradox … is that its dreams for the future are founded on a history of suffering, stigma, and violence" (1). Queer joy therefore looks backward in order to move forward; queer joy blends pain and happiness from the past and present with fear and hope for the future, neither the emotions nor the points on the timeline being framed as an either/or equation but rather as a both/and fusion. When defining "joyful ethics," feminist and LGBTQ theorist/philosopher Braidotti identifies components that are central to concepts of "queer joy": "A joyful ethics rests on an enlarged sense of a vital interconnection with a multitude of (human and non-human) others by removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism and anthropocentrism on the one hand and the barriers of negativity on the other. … A

joyful ethics frees difference from pejoration and replaces it with positivity" ("Joy" 221).

To realize the ethics of joy personally and politically, Braidotti argues that binary thinking must be replaced with a "process-oriented" philosophy that is relational and aspirational, one that profiles "becoming" and "*potentia*" and is "best posited as a continuum" ("Joy" 221–22). The future is the future, imagined, unrealized, or as José Muñoz writes in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*,

Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. (1)

Resistance, resilience, reparation, reclamation, transformation, vital interconnectedness and interdependence, prioritizing process and *potentia*, respecting and affirming differences … these are all key ideas that politicize joy and support queer joy as a course of action toward shaping futurities that deviate radically from the status quo without surrendering to chaos.

**Queer Joy, Queer Spaces, and Queer Time**

Applied to literary and other media forms and conventions, queer joy is characterized by its rejection of the habitual tragic narratives—narratives with no future—imposed on queer characters, those who are different, othered, and/or marginalized because they do not conform to sexual and/or gender expectations and stereotypes. Queer joy celebrates and normalizes difference by "orienting" those on the margins, discovering "the queer potential of the oblique" (Ahmed, "Orientations" 560), within spaces of belonging that cultivate promising futures. Queer joy "back-casts," "cast[ing] non-linear paths of becoming from the past, to the future, and back-forth till now," reflecting a characteristic of the human condition often overlooked or undercut by straight, linear narratives: "we are all rooted, though we flow" in different ways and along different paths (Braidotti, "Valedictory" 3, 8). Queer joy thus recognizes—and even embraces—the gritty and dark elements of life and pays tribute to those who inspired and encouraged queer joy to manifest itself

through family, friendships, community, all forms of regenerative "vital interconnection," "the high levels of interdependence, the vital reliance on others" (Braidotti, "Joy" 221–22). Queer joy requires safe spaces to activate "collective transformation of negative relations and passions into affirmative ones: a political praxis" (Braidotti, "Joy" 222). Queer joy therefore negotiates futurities, rather than simply a future, which are "simultaneous and sometimes competing with the idea of the future always contained within another project related to nation or identity," and "this nexus of identity and imagined world building" (Wanzo 119). One dominant project at the "nexus of identity and imagined world building" that queerness contests is the adherence to binarized sex, sexuality, and gender that underpins the promotion of the biological family and reproductive futurism, as discussed by Lee Edelman in his influential *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. In her examination of "queer time" in *Old Futures: Speculative Fiction and Queer Possibility* , Alexis Lothian argues, "The history of queer scholarship is a history of futures. … There is a powerful speculative element in the move from deconstructing existing binaries to visualizing—one might even say fictionalizing—how the world might be changed by those binaries' subversion or destruction" (5). In the safe spaces art and life provide as refuge from psychological and social chaos, queer joy is a powerful mechanism for inspiring and implementing such change.

Pioneer work was done by Laura Robinson ("Bosom Friends") and Benjamin Lefebvre ("Walter's Closet") on the queerness of Montgomery's characters through a more binary lens of sex, sexuality, and gender than what the lenses of queer joy, queer spaces, and queer time afford. More recently, a panel at the L.M. Montgomery Institute's 16th Biennial International Conference (19–23 June 2024) on "Bringing Queerness Home" included papers by Gemma Marr ("No Home on the Island: Responses to Queer Desire in *Anne with an 'E'*") and Josephine Rafe (JoJo) Lee ("Queering the Home: The Queer Domesticity of Green Gables")4 that skewed a binary-gendered perspective; neither, however, considered the significance of the triad of queer joy, spaces, and time in their presentations.

Most valuable, to date, for addressing queerness from two of these three angles is Katharine Slater's essay, "'A Ghost You Can *Feel* and *Hear* but Never *See*': Queer Hauntings in *Emily of New Moon*," in a 2024 collection celebrating *Emily of New Moon*'s one-hundredth anniversary. The very words "ghost" and "hauntings" in Slater's title signal that her focus is on "the specter of queerness" (144), the effect of the past on the present and on the "gestures toward a less uniform world where

clear categorical boundaries become ghosts, transparent and fading" (156). She explores the novel's narrative ruptures through the "destabilizing force of queerness" that leads to "a rejection of heteronormative futurity: a past and present dwelling that refuses or delays entry into marriage, reproduction, and linear temporalities" (145); however, my consideration of the impact that the injection of queer joy into potentially queer spaces and queered time has on shaping non-binarized, non-gendered futurities peels back another layer for engaging with the queerness of Montgomery's novels. Slater's insightful and valuable discussion of the redefining and queering of intimacy and love and how "[t]o be queer, within the Emily series, is to live and act in stark defiance of reproductive futurism, or the positioning of heterosexual coupling and procreation as the only ethical investment to be made for cultural survival" extends and problematizes "Lee Edelman's framework of reading queerness" (146). My paper too troubles Edelman's thesis of "no future" for queer communities in a society he sees as fixated on the Child and reproductive futurism by contextualizing and investigating Montgomery's novels and contemporary YA queer literature in multiverses of queer joy, queer spaces, and queer time.

## Happy Valleys: De-queering Spaces and Straightening Queerness in the *Anne* Novels

In the prologue to the collection *L.M. Montgomery's Rainbow Valleys*, Elizabeth Waterston observes that the title of Montgomery's 1919 novel, *Rainbow Valley*, captures both "high moments of joy and low moments of sorrow" (21). For children and occasionally for adults, "[t]his valley would be a haven from a grown-up world, with rainbow colours of laughter, fantasy, outrageous impudence, and happy comradeship, but tinted with presentiments of doom" (32). Rainbow Valley is a potentially queer space that provides queer-coded characters a retreat in which to thrive in Montgomery's *Rainbow Valley*, but by *Rilla of Ingleside* (1921), it is no longer a place of joy or of futurity. The impact of the "Great War" is the most obvious factor, something that Montgomery scholars have recognized and discussed from many different angles[5] and that is made very clear by *Rainbow Valley*'s backward-slanted dedication "[t]o the memory of" three Leaskdale-area soldiers "who made the supreme sacrifice that the happy valleys of their home land might be kept sacred from the ravage of the invader." In *Atlas of the Heart*, Brené Brown, a qualitative researcher in the fields of psychology and social work, observes that a

near enemy, "'a state of mind that appears similar to the desired state … but actually undermines it,'" often poses a greater threat than a far enemy because "more difficult to recognize" as an antagonistic force (119),[6] a thesis that Ahmed develops throughout *The Promise of Happiness* with reference to happiness in advocating for, among other subversive stances, "Feminist Killjoys" and "Unhappy Queers." The retreats in the later *Anne* novels—whether *Rainbow Valley* for the Blythe and Meredith children or Ingleside's hearth for three generations of the blended Blythe and Meredith families in *The Blythes Are Quoted*—may be "happy valleys" occasionally punctuated by seemingly joyful moments, but they are not places that generate and sustain genuine heartstopping moments with the potential for queer joy. The surviving Blythe and Meredith children become adults who settle for what Ahmed refers to as straight "happiness scripts," following "gendered scripts … orient[ing] subjects toward heterosexuality" (*Promise* 90), which prove to be near enemies of any non-binarized scripts orienting subjects toward queer joy. Neither safe space—neither *Rainbow Valley* nor the hearth—can prevent queerness from being straightened, primarily because both are fixated on the past and a fear of change.

Playing with Simone de Beauvoir's statement that "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," Ahmed makes the point that "[o]ne is not born, but becomes straight."[7] Becoming straight occurs in both space and time:

If orientation is a matter of how we reside or how we clear space that is familiar, then orientations also take time. Orientations allow us to take up space insofar as they take time. Even when orientations seem to be about which way we are facing in the present, they also point us toward the future. The hope of changing directions is always that we do not know where some paths may take us: risking departure from the straight and narrow, makes new futures possible, which might involve going astray, getting lost, or even becoming queer. ("Orientations" 554)

To lean into heartstopping moments and so to withstand or reverse the straightening, to withstand or reverse aligning "queer moments, moments of disorientation" on a vertical or horizontal axis, a re-orienting is required, which "might even find joy and excitement in the horror" of disorientation and living on a slant (Ahmed, "Orientations" 544).

*Rainbow Valley* uses the word "queer" thirteen times,[8] always in its primary meaning of "odd" and "strange," as it had evolved from its original root—whether

Greek or old German is up for debate—meaning cross, slant/oblique, adverse, but not consistently (and certainly not consciously by Montgomery) with its "newly sexually charged implications" that serve as a "destabilizing force" (Ahmed, "Orientations" 565; Slater 146, 145). It occurs most frequently when applied to or used by Mary Vance, from her first appearance as "this queer girl" (40), to her "queer, wild charm" (46) and "queer eyes" (273), elsewhere characterized as "strange," "very odd eyes—'white eyes'" (43, 39). Mary is an outsider, often depicted as a threat to the joyful childhood moments of Rainbow Valley, bullying little Rilla, putting on worldly airs, and trying to gain acceptance and entry into the "sanctum sanctorum of Rainbow Valley" (33)—an epithet that suggests the exclusivity of this childhood retreat—through unsolicited and sometimes misplaced advice based on gossip she has overheard in the adult world. Because this abused child is gender non-conforming in her bravado and boisterous behaviour that allies her more with the boys than girls, she brings an unconventional excitement and energy into the children's games played in Rainbow Valley (55–58). Nevertheless, as Waterston contends, Mary is a "malicious force … Manipulative and warped by early experiences, given to lying and trouble-making … Her sly gossip shadows the innocence of the Meredith children, and her spite adversely affects the lives of the young Blythes" (25). As she progresses through *Rainbow Valley*, Mary loses the "queer, wild charm" permissible during childhood and early girlhood, and although becoming less of a "malicious force" as she is straightened into household help for Miss Cornelia and, in *Rilla of Ingleside*, a dutiful wife to her man in khaki, Miller Douglas, her potential to be a queer force that inspires change diminishes. Hers is a traumatic story, but the trauma is not regenerative for herself, Glen St. Mary, or the larger community beyond.

Mary is entrapped in the coils of a binary-gendered "history of queer damage [that] retains its capacity to do harm in the present" (Love 9). Her queerness threatens a middle-class status quo, and she is straightened. I argue elsewhere that, unlike the orphan Anne to whom she is canonically compared and unlike any of the Blythe and Meredith children, "'Mary of little faith' is a scrapper … there is a slyness, wiliness, and mean streak about her that makes her a very different kind of 'artful dodger'—one who survives by her wits" ("L.M. Montgomery's Precocious Children" 58; *RV* 82–83, 75). In different ways and for different reasons than for Mary the survivor, young Anne and Faith Meredith also are straightened as they transition from childhood joy to adulthood happiness through domestication into the middle-class "happy family" script. Ahmed views this script as feeding into "both a myth of

happiness, of where and how happiness takes place, and a powerful legislative device, a way of distributing time, energy, and resources" (*Promise* 45). Like Anne who is first introduced when she is eleven, eleven-year-old Faith is characterized by her "joyous nature" (*RV* 46). Like Anne, she is "full of spunk," often "heedless and impulsive," and always laughing: "She can't even keep a straight face in church" (*RV* 11). Her disruptive, disorienting laughter displeases and often shocks her father's congregation, as do her admonishments that "[t]he world *isn't* a vale of tears … It's a world of laughter" (*RV* 29), again behaviour reminiscent of Anne's in *Anne of Green Gables*. Although Faith's lack of "straightness" endears her to the heathenish Norman Douglas, it also brings him back into the fold of church and hearth, albeit marrying Ellen West with her "almost masculine understanding" of "politics and world events" (*RV* 193) that seemingly provides her with insights into the near future—the inevitability of war—others lack. Despite their childhood "queerness," neither Anne nor Faith is a threat to the community's gendered scripts for a middle-class woman, finding happiness in conventional domestic roles. As adults, both Anne and Faith abnegate their queerness, stabilizing the status quo rather than leaning into heartstopping moments with the potential to destabilize binarized sex and gender norms.

**Straightening Time and Unqueering Futurities in the *Anne* Novels**

As children, the Rainbow Valley clans, the Blythes and Merediths, are supportive of Faith's differences, so much so that when Dan Reese bullies her for her love of Adam, her pet rooster—a love deemed "queer" by other members of the community (*RV* 185)—Walter assumes the chivalrous role of her "knight," her "Sir Galahad," defending her name: she is "Faith," not "pig-girl" or "rooster-girl" (*RV* 160–63). But what happens to this unconventional eleven-year-old girl, "a regular tomboy but pretty as a picture" (*RV* 10), with her joyous nature as she takes a straight path, with a few detours, through her teens to becoming a heteronormative wife and mother? *Rilla of Ingleside* opens with talk of the now twenty-one-year-old Jem and nineteen-year-old Faith "mak[ing] a match of it" (6). Before taking her place at Ingleside's hearth, she is given the opportunity to experience life beyond Rainbow Valley, as a nurse overseas, fulfilling her ambition—"Oh, if I were only a man, to go too" (52)—in a gender-acceptable occupation for an unmarried woman outside the home. Faith adapts to a world, one no longer with laughter, she says (134). After the war, she settles for straight happiness, not queer joy.

A frequent narrative pattern in late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature with queer-coded characters who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to one other is that one of the pair dies and the "surviving lover" finds "a heterosexual partner [with whom] to live happily ever after and lead a normal, straight life" (Hulan 17).9 Is it a stretch to consider Faith as undergoing a similar fate as that of the "surviving lover"? Before going overseas, she has as much of a history of attraction to queer-coded Walter (his queerness will be discussed below) as she does to Jem, despite community gossip linking her to the latter. It is, however, as illustrated in the previous paragraph, of a Romantic chivalrous nature, rather than either a romantic or sexual nature, befitting Walter's attraction to her. Gertrude Oliver is privy to Walter's secret that he has "written a sequence of sonnets 'to Rosamond'—i.e. Faith Meredith" (*RI* 16-17), perhaps an allusion to Samuel Daniel's "Complaint of Rosamond," which inspired late-Elizabethan narrative complaint poems and sonnet sequences. These are often transactional poems that give a voice to a woman who has been wrongly seduced and is bargaining for a place of belonging either in this world or an afterlife.10 If as a young teenager Faith has been seduced, or at least tempted, by Walter's queerness, as a young woman she now settles for a heteronormative marriage with Jem.11 Rilla judges Faith to be "almost happy" from a letter in which Faith reports being able to see Jem while he is on leave and she is a V.A.D. nurse in England. Faith's letter inspires Rilla to record in a journal entry on the last day of 1917 that she must remember that "Walter died for Canada" and that she must "try to 'keep faith' with him" (*RI* 298). It is noteworthy, however, that by the end of *Rilla of Ingleside* and throughout *The Blythes Are Quoted*, both Faith and "keeping faith" have almost disappeared. The associations of Faith's name with the mantra "keep(ing) faith" demonstrate that no matter how potentially joyful—in its queer sense—the adolescent Faith may be, she too is straightened into an adulthood that settles for the status quo, therefore losing the opportunity for transformative change by instead "keeping faith" with the conventions and values of the old world.

In his afterword to *The Blythes Are Quoted*, Lefebvre notes that in the book's typescript "Montgomery included the term 'Great War' on the title page, but crossed out 'Great' and added 'First World' in ink, an admission that the new world she had once predicted would emerge out of the ashes of the Great War would not materialize after all." The prediction that Lefebvre alludes to can be found throughout *Rilla of Ingleside*, with its overt celebration of war "as a necessary sacrifice for the sake of a peaceful future" (519), and throughout Montgomery's journals, but so too can its more subtle subversion.12 Indeed, "keeping faith" is a

near enemy because it is in opposition to building a new world with its foundation in joy, and specifically queer joy.

In theory, “keeping faith” has the potential to align with queer joy because it is cognizant of the suffering and sacrifices that make a new order possible. The first time the idea arises, however, it understandably lacks this awareness because it is the response of a convoy of soldiers, as young as sixteen, being sent off to war, incited by an address from Reverend Meredith and a recitation of Walter’s “The Piper”: “The solders cheered … like mad and cried ‘We’ll follow—we’ll follow—we won’t break faith’” (*RI* 231). By the time Rilla reads the last letter from a now-dead Walter in Rainbow Valley, she understands that “pain and comfort are strangely mingled.” The comfort Rilla finds is “a different thing from tremulous hope and faith” had Walter lived and thrived, a faith that “[t]he personality that had expressed itself in that last letter … must carry on, though the earthly link with things of earth were broken.” Rilla has faith that although there has been a rupture, the medium of art will ensure survival of the ideal of Walter’s sense of beauty and truth. In Walter’s last letter, he speaks of when, in Rainbow Valley, he “had a queer vision or presentiment” of the Piper and later, when in no man’s land, of the collapsing of time and space: “all the beautiful things I have always loved seem to have become possible again—and this is good, and makes me feel a deep, certain, exquisite happiness” (*RI* 246–47). Walter’s vision, his ideal, is, however, a return to a past that, as Svetlana Boym says of nostalgia, can “produce ‘erroneous representations’ that cause[] the afflicted to lose touch with the present”: “Modern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values; it could be a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history” (3, 8). Walter’s vision for the future may not be rooted in an ideal quite as prelapsarian as Boym’s description of the “enchanted world” characterizing modern nostalgia, but it is, nevertheless, an impossible return to an ostensibly happy, never-existent past. Moreover, in trying to root himself in a home and vision that are ahistorical, Walter is not just entangled but irreparably strangled by the coils of a very real and very chaotic history.

## Flattening Rainbows, Bends, and Curves: Caught in the Cyclical Coils of Nature and History

For the children, Rainbow Valley is “a fairy realm of romance,” named for the rainbow that appeared when on the “aftermath of a summer thunderstorm, they had seen the beloved spot arched by a glorious rainbow” (*RV* 18). Despite the promise of affirmative change that a rainbow brings after a storm, the valley is held in thrall by the cyclical rotations of the seasons. By the beginning of *Rilla of Ingleside*, Rainbow Valley is a place of silence, broken only by wind chimes the children hung there ten years ago, reminding Gertrude “of the aerial, celestial music Adam and Eve heard in Milton’s Eden”; it seems to be an ahistorical place where Walter reads, Rilla dreams, and lovers “tryst” (27–28). When war is first declared, Rilla seeks refuge in this place steeped in “ancient history” and in which the skies are “unchanged” over the years. Here she tries “to adjust herself, if it were possible, to the new world … that left her half bewildered as to her own identity.” In the six days since the declaration of war, Rilla seems to have “lived as much … as in all her previous life—and if it be true that we should count time by heart-throbs[,] she had.” Like the cyclical coils of history, the cyclical coils of the seasons are indifferent to human life with its intense, heartstopping moments of joy and pain best measured in erratic surges or pulses that have the potential to spiral out of the cycle: “Everything was just the same as she had seen it hundreds of times; and yet the whole face of the world seemed changed” (51–52).13 These descriptions bode a new order, one amenable to a queer “identity” arising out of bewilderment, in which time is measured affectively rather than linearly and which can adjust rather than succumb to historical vicissitudes.

When peace is declared, and Rilla celebrates by “kicking joyously” her green hat “about the room until it is without form and void”—“a most unladylike” celebration—she speaks of the need to “sober down—and ‘keep faith’—and begin to build up our new world.” She also speaks of a “new happiness” but immediately regresses to the past when rhapsodizing about “all the dear, sweet, sane, *homey* things that we can have again now” (*RI* 348–49). In the final paragraphs of the novel, a much-changed Ken returns and finds that “[t]he slim Rilla of four years ago had rounded out into symmetry” from schoolgirl to a “desirable” woman—“the woman of his dreams.” Rilla has a final opportunity, felt viscerally and bodily in a heartstopping moment, to lean into an oblique path that her earlier bewilderment about her identity, quoted in the previous paragraph, teased: “Emotion shook Rilla from head to foot. Joy—happiness—sorrow—fear—every passion that had wrung her heart in those four long years seemed to surge up in her soul for a moment as the deeps of being were stirred.” Her childish “Yeth” in response to Ken’s question whether she is “Rilla-*my*-Rilla,” Walter’s childhood name for her, signals a lost opportunity because

she is mired in the past and fearful of a chaotic unfamiliar future (358). Rilla therefore clings to a faith that this rupture in time will bring a new order almost identical to the imagined past, a very different kind of faith than Muñoz's utopia: "Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing" (1). Walter could very well be for Rilla what is "missing," but Walter has remained essentially unchanged between *Rainbow Valley* and *Rilla of Ingleside*, while in *The Blythes Are Quoted*, he is frozen as a memory and characters like Una are frozen by memory.14 The Ingleside hearth becomes a closed circle, an exclusive enclave, which some of their neighbours, feeling themselves outsiders, mock. In the *Anne* novels, the cycles of history are on repeat, revolving circles that a tug, or rupture such as a "Great War," pulls into a straight line from the past through the present to the future.

As the children gather in Rainbow Valley in the last chapter of *Rainbow Valley*, titled "'Let the Piper Come,'" for one last "festival" before Jem leaves to attend university, there is "a hint of sorrow in every gay young heart" with the predictions that their "charmed circle would be broken" in the future. Jem wishes "we had the old days back again" and envisions a future in which he is a soldier in a "big battle" (298). Jem's allusion to the "old days" refers back to earlier scenes, such as those "jolly times" when they staged "a sham battle," thirteen-year-old Jem being at "the stage where all boys hanker to be soldiers," says Anne (64–65). While these "old days" may appear to be Braidotti's "back-casting," characteristic of queer time, "cast[ing] non-linear paths of becoming from the past, to the future, and back-forth till now" ("Valedictory" 3), the spatial and metaphorical temporal paths in these later *Anne* novels are linear, not non-linear, and while they may have bends, like Anne's famous "bend in the road" (*AGG* 364), or the "curves and dips" that Susette King in "The Road to Yesterday" favours over "straight" roads (*BAQ* 487), they are all still the same paths, the same roads. Like Faith, Jem has already been straightened into conventional binary-gendered roles. The linear paths are straight from past to the future despite Anne's gratitude "that never would it be necessary for the sons of Canada to ride forth to battle 'for the ashes of their fathers and the temples of their gods'" (*RV* 298), which the retrospective telling of this narrative belies.

**Extinguishing Joy: Back to the Future on Repeat**

Jem gleefully welcomes the Piper in the last sentence of *Rainbow Valley*—"Let the Piper come and welcome … I'll follow him gladly round and round the world," picking

up Walter's metaphor of their being caught in the cyclical, linear paths of history, uttered just before Jem's welcome, of "something apart from him … speaking through his lips" that all of them "must follow … round and round the world" (299). Walter's path is also straightened into a conventional narrative arc but in a different way from Jem's. As a young adult, in *Rilla of Ingleside*, Walter has internalized the scorn and harassment, the homophobia, that he has received for presenting as feminine ("femme") from childhood bullies and even from the beloved housekeeper Susan Baker, who sees writing poetry as impeding a gender-appropriate narrative arc into manhood and whose form of conversion therapy is an "emulsion of cod-liver oil" (*RV* 66–67). As I argue in my *L.M. Montgomery and Gender* essay, this internalized homophobia results in his embodiment of the anachronistic persona and fate of *kalos Thanatos* ("a beautiful warrior's beautiful death") in both his patriotic actions and "immortal" poem, "The Piper." He becomes one of Sandra Gilbert's "*un* men," a soldier inhabiting no man's land, an "'inhumane new era and a citizen of the unpromising new land into which this war of wars had led him.'"[15] This "new era" and "new land" will ultimately self-destruct rather than repair and regenerate.

Like the "savage fury and a joy in the struggle" that his battle with Dan Reese unleashes (*RV* 166), I maintain that Walter's "reckless" behaviour on the battlefield suggests a death wish aligning him with gay poets such as Siegfried Sassoon (Clement, "From 'Uncanny Beauty'" 57) and, even more particularly, Wilfred Owen, who died in action at age twenty-five. Furthermore, it aligns him with dead gay characters reflective of the "Bury Your Gays" trope that "originated in the late 19th century, gained traction in the early 20th century, and which persists in modern media."[16] Given the legislation at the end of the nineteenth century in both the US and UK outlawing same-sex "perverse acts" and the representation of them, gay and lesbian characters were either "framed in a negative manner" (that is, as villains), subtly coded as queer, or both (Hulan 18–19). If in Walter's and Faith's mutual attraction, albeit Romantic, Faith is given the opportunity to survive through "a process of re-acclimation" (Hulan 17), as I developed earlier, the "stripling boy" of Walter' poem "The Aftermath" must die. I have elsewhere argued that the persona's killing of "my brother fair and slim" in "The Aftermath," the final poem of *The Blythes Are Quoted*, can be read as Walter's death wish ("From 'Uncanny Beauty'" 56); moreover, it can also be read as the killing of his sexual queerness or his queer other when he runs his bayonet through this "stripling boy," a "pale and pretty lad," and the "lust of blood made even cowards bold." The monstrous "horrid joy"—"I killed him horribly and I was glad"—and the "glee" that he experiences in killing the

boy as he “writhed there like a worm” are coded sexually, reinforced by the poem’s final three lines that repeat the word “writhe,” this time rhyming it with “blithe,” a surname no longer as joyful—but perhaps now as indifferent—as the word doubly denotes:

> The wind that yester morning was so blithe …
> And everywhere I look I see him writhe,
> That pretty boy I killed. (509–10; ellipsis in original)

Walter’s four poems in the “Au Revoir” section of *The Blythes Are Quoted*, of which “The Aftermath” is the final one, demonstrate a queer character’s two options, both deadly: regression “to a time and place of solitude and beauty, a past dead and gone” or progression to a “deathlike existence” (Clement, “From ‘Uncanny Beauty’” 58–59). This latter option clearly reflects Edelman’s “no future” and not Muñoz’s “Utopia,” “distilled from the past and used to imagine a future” (1). In her chapter on “Happy Futures,” Ahmed observes that Edelman’s queer stance on “no future” “is still affirming something in the act of refusing affirmation” (*Promise* 161). The queerness in the later *Anne* books—whether seen through the straightening of Mary, Faith, Rilla, and Anne herself or the ahistorical freezing in memory of Walter—struggles and fails to affirm anything because its happiness is rooted in a faith in reproductive futurism and the resurrection of an idyllic past world of truth and beauty. The present era can popularize Walter’s jingoistic “The Piper” while the queerness of “The Aftermath” remains in the closet, read only by Anne to Jem who questions the truth of Walter’s ever bayonetting any man (*BAQ* 510). While the “horrid joy” of “The Aftermath” has the potential to transform into queer joy at some future time and in some future new world, it is not affirmatively slanted but twisted into a cry of anguish. Walter has become one of those “corpses of gender and sexual deviants” with which “[t]he history of Western representation is littered”—dead—the alternative being to survive “on such compromised terms that it makes death seem attractive” (Love 1). In *The Blythes Are Quoted*, that “the alternative” was never an option for Walter is reinforced when in the final family gathering by the Ingleside hearth, with only Anne and Jem present, Anne says, “I am thankful now, Jem, that Walter did not come back. He could never have lived with his memories … and if he had seen the futility of the sacrifice they made then mirrored in this ghastly holocaust,” the Second World War, to which Jem replies that forgetfulness, something Walter is incapable of, is the only way forward for survival (510; ellipsis in original). Walter has lost the queer challenge “[f]or groups constituted by historical

injury, the challenge … to engage with the past without being destroyed by it" (Love 1).[17]

**Emily's Rainbow Joy and Its "Near Enemies"**

Life, of course, went on in spite of its dreadfulness. The routine of existence doesn't stop because one is miserable. There were even some moments that were not altogether bad. Emily again measured her strength with pain and again conquered. (*EQ* 209)

Emily Byrd Starr is faced with a similar queer challenge as those in the later *Anne* books: her quest is how to reconcile the rootedness of biological family and nature—the "routine of existence"—and the often chaotic flow of creativity and existential aspiration, which can pull rainbow joy in Braidotti's back-casting directions, and so to resist being straightened by linear time, sustain her moments of rainbow joy in both queer spaces and straight places, and experience belonging both within and beyond New Moon. In my essay on "Emily Byrd Starr Meets Brené Brown: 'Braving the Wilderness' and Achieving 'True Belonging,'" I argue that by the end of the trilogy, Emily succeeds in "inhabiting a space of 'true belonging,' a wilderness where inner and outer worlds intersect and often collide" as she, along with the novel's three other young people from their childhood friend group, navigates challenges related to "shame, humiliation, and fear; authenticity, (im)perfection, and connection; hurt/soul-wounds, vulnerability, and boundaries" (54–55). But Emily, Teddy, Ilse, and Perry must also recognize the differences between joy and some of its near enemies, such as gaiety,[18] contentedness, pleasure, rapture, and happiness. These near enemies are confronted much more consciously—and successfully—in the *Emily* trilogy than in the later *Anne* novels.

In the conversation between Emily and Mr. Carpenter with which this paper begins, he advises her to stay in the valley if she is wise but concedes that she may have what it takes to climb the hills out of the valley. She is one of those people "who can't breathe properly in the valleys" (*ENM* 408–09). As seen in the previous sections, valleys—specifically Rainbow Valley—may foster happiness, but they inhibit climbing the hill and participating in shaping a new world, a new order, through queer joy. *Emily of New Moon* ends with thirteen-year-old Emily making her way home—"so happy that her happiness seemed to irradiate the world with its own splendour"—to her "lookout room," which has become a safe space for Emily and which is "flooded with soft splendour." She finds "pleasure" in her surroundings and

is “so full of rapture that she must write it out” before leaving “her world of dreams” to re-enter “the world of reality.” She begins “a diary, that it may be published when I die,” and “on its first virgin page,” she writes: “New Moon, Blair Water, P.E. Island” (409–10). As yet, this is where Emily’s real worlds end, with her imagined aspirational and creative worlds being in totally different dimensions.

When *Emily Climbs* opens, a few months later, Emily is situated “alone in her room, in the old New Moon farmhouse at Blair Water, one stormy night in a February of the olden years before the world turned upside down. She was at that moment as perfectly happy as any human being is ever permitted to be” (1). Although the *Emily* novels do not directly involve the impact of the war, these references to the past (“old” and “olden”) and to a rupture in space and time when “the world turned upside down” clearly allude to the war that so affected the later *Anne* novels. In her chapter in *L.M. Montgomery and War*, “*Emily’s Quest*: L.M. Montgomery’s Green Alternative to Despair and War?” Elizabeth Epperly concludes: “Montgomery chose to leave the First World War out of Emily’s story, and she focused instead on addressing our consuming human struggle with meaning and despair. … [I]maginative power builds through a connecting that is inspiringly accessible and always in process. We are not meant to hold rainbow gold, but to perceive and to pursue it, knowing disappointments always to be part of any meaningful dwelling” (229–30). Epperly’s “meaningful dwelling” is, I contend, infused with queer joy. Ahmed ends her essay on “Orientations” with the observation, “A queer phenomenology would involve an orientation toward queer, a way to inhabit the world that gives ‘support’ to those whose lives and loves make them appear oblique, strange, and out of place” (570). With its representations of queer orientations, the *Emily* trilogy itself becomes a joyous, welcoming queered space that depicts “desire lines” (Ahmed 570) disturbing history’s and nature’s fixed cyclical patterns, very unlike the disruptions and the responses to these disruptions that are foreshadowed in *Rainbow Valley* and realized in *Rilla of Ingleside* and *The Blythes Are Quoted*.

**Breaking Out of Cycles to Experience Queer Joy in the *Emily* Trilogy**

Slater maintains that in the first book of the trilogy, New Moon provides Emily a queer space with queer representations of love and intimacy and with the ruptures characteristic of queer time. However, she also contends that the heterosexual marriage toward which Emily is progressing in the two subsequent books destroys the oblique differences that underpin queerness “to return to the safety of the status

quo," even though "the eventual destruction of difference does not erase the existence of that difference … in *Emily of New Moon*, the queerest of the three novels" (145). In discussing the queering of the relationship between Emily and her Aunt Elizabeth, Slater remarks on "Montgomery's refusal to substitute happiness for love. Grief, pain, and seriousness … provid[e] an anchor to their new closeness that distinguishes it from easy joy" (155). I argue that Montgomery refuses also to substitute happiness for joy—never "easy" but potentially queer—and that *Emily Climbs* and *Emily's Quest* are as essential for understanding the queerness of this trilogy as is *Emily of New Moon* through their disruptions of cyclical time and straight spaces.

Joy—and specifically queer joy—helps heal Emily's trauma from experiencing the death of her father and the unfeeling environment before, during, and after his death that she must endure as well as what Anastasia Ulanowicz describes as "the inheritance of family trauma … [which] is concerned with the repetition of trauma through consecutive generations" of her "maternal legacy" (207–08).19 Emily may be "the queerest child"—she may "talk queer," "act queer," and "look queer," Ellen Greene's chastisement of Emily for not "learn[ing] how to be like other children" and therefore deserving the dislike of "folks [who] don't care for queer children" (*ENM* 24, 26)—but her queerness will not kill her as it has done historically with other traumatized queer-coded characters. Slater claims that "[t]o be queer, in the Emily books, is to be haunted both by what has been and what can never be" (146). Factoring in queer joy, however, transforms "what can never be" into *potentia*. Emily challenges the "no future" of queer trauma and of childless representations as well as the "no future" of the suicidal thoughts she suffers from debilitating loneliness ( *EQ* 208–09) by forging futurities—her own and those of an expanded community—rooted in queer joy.

Frequently in the *Emily* series the idea of joy—Slater's "easy joy" perhaps—is associated with "youth's joy in mere existence" (*EQ* 3);20 however, it evolves into Emily's "rainbow joy," a queer joy that goes beyond either personal contentedness and happiness or youthful raptures and ecstasy to the *potentia* of a new way of engaging with space, time, and hence of futurities that contest the agendas of binarized sex and gender and reproductive futurism, despite the heteronormative pairings of Ilse with Perry and Emily with Teddy that emerge out of their childhood friend group. In the liminal space between earthly pleasures and happiness and otherworldly rapture and ecstasy, a space she will capture in and through her

writing, Emily discovers her own brand of rainbow joy, one that evolves out of the "flashes" of childhood and will inform all the paths that her future life and art hold.

**Emily's "Different Kind of Happiness": The Flash and Rainbow Joy**

"Emily's queerness finds a queer welcome in New Moon" with the Murrays, "a 'darn queer lot,'" Slater argues (147; *ENM* 84). She discusses the roles of Aunts Laura and Elizabeth Murray and of Aunts Nancy and Caroline Priest—the latter being "the most visible ghosts of pathological sapphism" (148–49)—and mentions Janet Royal—"coded as lesbian, [she offers] Emily entrance into a world where heterosexuality is decentered" (156n2)—as representations of queerness for modelling Emily's growth. None, however, offers Emily the kind of joyful representation that will take her from being "as perfectly happy as any human being is ever permitted to be" (*EC* 1) as she ascends the Alpine Path to recognizing and embracing her queerness—the quest of the final book in the trilogy when "she wakened to a new world where everything had to be readjusted," a rupture caused by Ilse's jilting of Teddy on their wedding day and eloping with Perry. At the time, Emily is "too tired to care for readjustment" (*EQ* 256), and when she wishes her childhood friend forever happiness, Ilse "contentedly" admonishes her, "How blessedly Victorian that sounds" (259). Emily's happiness will be "A Different Kind of Happiness" (the title of chapter 24 of *Emily of New Moon* that focuses on Emily's stay at Wyther Grange with her Priest aunts and sets happiness and freedom in opposition to one another).

This "different kind of happiness" is captured in the image of the rainbow, which in the *Emily* trilogy is metaphorical, not physical and symbolic as is the rainbow for which Rainbow Valley has been named with one end that "seemed to dip straight down … into the lower end of the valley (*RV* 18). As a child, Emily "seek[s] the rainbow's end," but she discovers that there is not just one rainbow and that when its "wonderful arch" fades, another will reappear on a different horizon: "There will be other rainbows." Like Teddy, "the rainbow-seeker," she commits to being "a chaser of rainbows," understanding that there is not just one futurity to which to aspire. Teddy, "too, knew—had known for years—the delight and allurement and despair and anguish of the rainbow quest" (*EQ* 6–8). Moreover, Emily comes to understand that different rainbows—not only those signifying her literary aspirations and her romantic interests but also those signifying her quest for spaces of belonging, local and global—are not in binary oppositions to one another, nor are

they in opposition with those of a soulmate such as Teddy. Indeed, this is what distinguishes him as a soulmate. He is someone with whom she will continue and share the joy of their ever-changing journey.

Emily's "different kind of happiness" transforms her childhood's poetic "flash" inspired by beauty into a more sustainable vision for the novels she will go on to write and the life she will go on to live. The "flash," like joy itself, is sharp, intense, and short-lived. Like bursts of joy, Emily's "flash" is a "moment [that] came rarely—went swiftly, leaving her breathless with the inexpressible delight of it." Emily's "flash" is individualistic, marking her out as unique, a poet with no ties or responsibilities to anyone or anything else. Unlike the collective memories that underpin nostalgia, such as Walter experiences, the "flash" is something that Emily "could never recall … never summon … never pretend … but the wonder of it stayed with her for days." The "flash" does not follow well-worn paths: "It never came twice with the same thing. … It had come with a high, wild note of wind in the night, … with a greybird lighting on her window-sill in a storm … And always when the flash came to her Emily felt that life was a wonderful, mysterious thing of persistent beauty" (*ENM* 8–9). Emily's "flashes" are the kinds of heartstopping moments that break out of nature's repetitive patterns to inspire and infuse an art that has the *potentia* to challenge conventional patterns by bringing in a new era of rainbow joy. But for it to heal and repair, Emily must discover how to channel this rainbow joy into a personal and political praxis, a queer joy that will inform her mundane life and be shared.21

**Queer Joy: Emily's and Beyond**

*The Moral of the Rose*, the novel that introduces Emily to the world beyond Blair Water, arrives to her in "an instantaneous vision … as a whole—a witty, sparkling rill of human comedy" (*EQ* 171). This inspiration flows out of "a certain small, futile anger with Teddy" because in the painting that earns him global recognition, he has captured her "seeing that unseeable thing you used to call your flash," says Ilse, reflected in "a smile that seems to hint at some exquisitely wonderful secret you could tell if you liked—some whisper eternal—a secret that would make every one happy if they could get you to tell it" (170). And, it seems, she does "tell it." Emily's "different kind of happiness" has evolved into the queer joy of resistance in a novel with a "sweetish heroine" that one negative reviewer finds to be "something of a bore" and criticizes as being "queer but altogether too queer" (212). This ambivalent

comment suggests the shifts that post–First World War criticism began to take, dismissing anything or anyone who is “sweet” and exudes joy as not only “a bore” but also subscribing to “mere optimism” that is naive, simplistic, shallow, and trite, characteristic of sentimental writing for women and children.22 However, when brought into the politicized context of the focus on joy in contemporary queer, Black, and Indigenous movements, this joy has the potential to resist division and privileging uniqueness by celebrating differences with and within a shared humanity. This joy can also avoid audacious fearlessness by leaning into fear, resist despair by embracing hope, and eschew valorizing accomplishment by valuing *potentia*.

Queer joy is rooted in hope, and both hope and fear are forward-slanted emotions that can cancel each other out if not aligned with one other. The far enemy of queer joy—an opposite emotion or experience (Brown, *Atlas* 119)—and of leaning into the unfamiliar slants that queer joy inspires is fear, and as I argue in my “Emily Byrd Starr Meets Brené Brown” essay, what Emily and Teddy must learn is that “[i]n their quest for their rainbows, fear will always be along for the ride. From Brown’s perspective, they will need to recognize that fear must be ‘understood and respected, perhaps even befriended’ to benefit from it (*Atlas* 13)” (59). When she is seventeen, Emily receives Janet Royal’s offer to move to New York City, and her fear of losing the rootedness that the past secures causes her to refuse. She finds “enchantment” enough “in the curve of the dark-red, dew-wet road beyond” and “[a] deep, inner contentment” that kin and family traditions provide her as do the old house, her lookout room, the old garden and surrounding landscape—all safe spaces to which she can retreat (*EC* 362–63). Emily tells Janet that she can carve out her own place of belonging here without “stodgy” “settl[ing] down” and that her vision will allow her to see beyond the local “to the stars” as she shares the same sky as everyone else (*EC* 365–66). Emily has climbed, and now her rainbow quest for happiness will evolve into a queer quest for joy.

Riffing off Emily’s paternal name—Starr—I have argued that the “star power of Montgomery’s characters” resides in their “recogniz[ing] and embrac[ing] being part of a galaxy” as exemplified by “the final scene when Emily Starr and Teddy Kent stand separate yet together” in “a place of their shared humanity” (“Emily Byrd Starr” 65). By the end of the trilogy, Emily understands that past, present, and future relate to one another not in linear, circular, or cyclical patterns but as stars moving in their own galaxy capable of resisting, shifting, and even breaking out of the pattern in which the gravitational force keeps them in place (and space) to be

reconfigured without sheer chaos. Emily's other two names, "Emily Byrd," her father's mother's name, unite Emily's male and female heritages. Her father thinks "Emily" is not only a "quaint" name but also "arch and delightful" (*ENM* 15–16), "arch" suggesting both its adjectival sense of playful and nounal sense of the curvature of rainbows and supportive structures alike. "Byrd" does not separate but disrupts and then binds "Emily" to "Starr" in a potentially new configuration.

Throughout the trilogy, birds are associated with inspiring meaningful and even galactic and intergalactic communication. Teddy "can whistle just like a bird," a quality that comes to characterize his "call" to Emily, "the one he used just for her—a funny, dear little call, like three clear bird notes" (*ENM* 152, 173). Like Walter's piper, Teddy's bird-call is irresistible, but for Emily, it is more than that—it is a heartstopping and heart-enhancing moment: "That call had an odd effect on Emily … it fairly drew the heart out of her body—and she *had* to follow it. She thought Teddy could have whistled her clear across the world with those three magic notes" (*ENM* 173). Unlike Walter's piper and like Teddy and Emily's Vega of the Lyre, the bird's call forges oblique paths of *potentia*, Braidotti's "untapped potential to generate alternatives, illuminate the past otherwise and design possible futures," a "form of power … that calls for actualisation" ("Valedictory" 6, 8). Unlike Walter's piper and like their constellational star, Teddy's "calls" disrupt timelines and physical spaces affectively to forge what Ahmed refers to as new "desire lines,"

> unofficial paths, those marks left on the ground that show everyday comings and goings, where people deviate from the paths they are supposed to follow. Deviation leaves its own marks on the ground, which can even help generate alternative lines, which cross the ground in unexpected ways. Such lines are indeed traces of desire, where people have taken different routes to get to this point or that point. It is certainly desire that helps generate a queer landscape, shaped by the paths that we follow in deviating from the straight line. (570)

Emily has her own "calls" that defy time and space and save her and Teddy from potential disaster, one summoning Teddy in the Mad Mr. Morrison episode and another preventing him from boarding the ill-fated *Flavian*, from *Emily Climbs* and *Emily's Quest*, respectively. All three names—Emily, Byrd, and Starr—portend the life of a young protagonist who finds joy in her life and her vocation (that is, her calling) from both rootedness and flow by accepting the queer challenges inherent in resilience, resistance, reparation from childhood and inherited trauma, and

reclamation of her sense of worth and belonging in the face of queer-coded otherness, her own and others'. Writers such as Canadian C.E. Gatchalian, author of *Double Melancholy: Art, Beauty, and the Making of a Brown Queer Man*, have discovered in the young Anne these qualities: as Margaret Steffler and I write in our "Preface to the Afterwords" of *Children and Childhoods in L.M. Montgomery: Continuing Conversations*, Gatchalian "explains how as a 'little brown Filipinx boy who had just started feeling the first vague stirrings of queer desire,' with no representation in art or literature for role models, he found in Anne an outsider who succeeds through her 'transgressive' resistance and her 'striv[ing], Herculean, towards unadulterated poetry, beauty, transcendence'" (278).23 While Montgomery did not give Anne or Anne's children the opportunity to realize their queer potential in adulthood, she did so with Emily, infusing her unhappiness script—a counteraction to Ahmed's "happiness script" previously discussed—with queer joy, and so helping to build an "unhappy queer archive."24 Emily's process is the kind of transformative *potentia* and vital interconnectedness and interdependence that via circuitous and often chaotic historical roots and routes—through the modernist dismissal of optimism, hope, and joy as trite from the 1920s onward and through the gritty and dark "new realism" of the twentieth century to today's divisiveness and fear forcing society and its modes of expression back into the past and well-worn paths that conform to the status quo—now informs the queer joy reflected in such unambivalent and confident twenty-first-century queer representations of futurities as espoused in Alice Oseman's YA oeuvre.

## Profiling a Contemporary YA Representation of Queer Joy and Futurities: Personal and Political Praxis in *Heartstopper*

Oseman's hugely popular and impactful *Heartstopper* graphic-novel series celebrated its eighth anniversary on 1 September 2024.25 The series has reached an even wider audience through its Netflix adaptations, which launched in April 2022 and, along with creators and cast, have been recognized by and received awards from prominent LGBTQ+ advocacy groups.26 Although the novels and adaptations have not been without criticism, especially from those who prefer steamier scenes and more conventional, grittier (and often tragic) representations of YA queerness and who conflate joy with "sap," "cringe," or "mere optimism," the numbers confirm not just the popularity but also the impact of this series.27 Both the graphic novels and the Netflix adaptations have become "possibility models"—a variation of Ahmed's "desire lines" and a term adopted by the trans community instead of "role

model" that "gives people space to find their own path, their own possibilities, rather than base their ambitions directly on the achievements of another" (Pearce)—for contemporary representations of queer joy. The most accessible version of Oseman's graphic novels is the free online version available through Tapas. This version has a fitting epigraph, taken from Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*: "I will listen to the mountain bird. Oh, a heartstopper is the solitaire's one note—high, sweet, lonely, magic. You hold your breath to listen … No … Gone. What was I to say to her?"28 Even though this bird song has only one note and Teddy's has three, the magical joyousness of both complements overcoming fear to reach out to a hesitant or reluctant listener through a heartstopping moment that disrupts time and space to tell untold stories that matter—from the past, present, and future—and to model possibilities that shore up against looming chaos.

After the then twenty-year-old Oseman published her debut novel, *Solitaire*, in 2014, she thought that two characters—Charlie Spring, the brother of *Solitaire*'s central character Tori, and Charlie's boyfriend, Nick Nelson, both in their mid-teens—needed better representation and fuller development. She felt compelled to write their "origin story," and to do so, she needed to go backward, disrupting a chronological timeframe and creating, as Oseman says in a May 2023 podcast interview, "such different stories … so different in tone": "'Solitaire' is so much darker and it's a much more visceral look at what having a mental illness is like, whereas [in] 'Heartstopper,' the focus is always on recovery … optimism and hope" ("Alice Oseman"). Because of the nature of *Heartstopper*'s graphic-novel format, to which the Netflix adaptations adhere closely, Nick and Charlie's story is told in vignettes, slices of life, and although these generally progress chronologically, visual effects in both the canonical texts and adaptations break frames and spill out. The result is often appropriately disjointed, but never chaotic.29 Nick and Charlie's story, as well as each of their individual stories and those of the supportive queer community to which they belong, is a queer story that, Oseman recognizes, does not have the conventional "beginning, middle, end structure" of a "standalone novel." Moreover, the graphic-novel format and thirty-minute televised instalments allow an episodic presentation that profiles heartstopping moments, the kind of affective timeline that Rilla experiences as heart-throbs (*RI* 51, 358), but rejects, and Emily comes to experience in writing her novels and finally responding to Teddy's bird-call. As in the *Emily* trilogy, Oseman's heartstopping moments and the queer joy they signal are rooted in confronting the daily fears of life, the only way forward to shaping queer futurities.

Oseman's back-casts are to the past and are non-linear—pictured as threatening black monster figures—Charlie's trauma from past bullying when he was outed as gay the previous year and from Ben Hope's emotionally abusive treatment and (sexual) assault, which open both the graphic-novel and Netflix adaptation series. These traumatic back-casts are intense but short-lived, and from the beginning, Charlie is figured as a survivor, even when later in the series, triggered by traumatic memories, his mental health spirals out of control to the point that his OCD-induced eating disorder and self-harm jeopardize his physical and psychological health. He spends some time in a mental-health facility, where he is assigned a therapist who assists him to confront his fear that he will never get better and to begin to heal. Suggested similarly but less threatening than the monster figures are the swirling threads indicating Nick's anxiety attacks, caused by his father's abandonment of the family when Nick was very young and gendered expectations of Nick to excel at rugby and find himself a girlfriend.

As both Volume 5 and Season 3 end,[30] the future is uncertain and not without challenges as they face a long-distance relationship with Nick going off to university and Charlie remaining at home for his final year of school. As the podcaster remarks in the May 2023 interview, *Solitaire* and *Heartstopper* have now reached a "merge point": "You just go backwards and forwards. You're like your own little … jumping timeline" ("Alice Oseman"). Charlie's possible relapses into past behaviours related to his eating disorder and self-harm hover on a future horizon as do Nick's co-dependency and fear of communicating openly and causing disruptions in the lives of family and friends. Nick's challenges have been sparked by his troubled sense of identity as he struggled to understand the implications of his bisexuality upending linear expectations of how his life would unfold, explored in the earlier volumes/seasons. Given the joy—the queer joy—of the unconditional love from their friend group—which includes trans Elle and her straight boyfriend Tao, the lesbian couple Tara and nonbinary Darcy, aroace Isaac/demisexual Aled,[31] and even some of Nick's supportive "rugby lads"—the optimism and hope seem warranted, attested by images that Oseman has posted on Tumblr of Nick and Charlie's life together in the future. To achieve the sense of a new world rooted in queer joy, both personal and collective heartstopping joy underpins an ethos that works to heal damaged psyches, build resilience and strength, and slant potentially debilitating fear and despair into affirmative behaviour and action that profiles community and communication. This does not ignore or negate the teenage bullying (past and current), the internalized homophobia of the ironically named Ben Hope, and the

legacy of bad parenting that Charlie's mother inherits. However, for every Jane Spring and Amanda Olsson (Darcy's homophobic mother), there is a Sarah Nelson (Nick's mother), Yan Zu (Tao's mother), and Mariam and Richard Argent (Elle's parents). Chosen family, biological or logical, and friend groups become all the more crucial to forge communication lines and build communities that sustain joyous futures to withstand chaos. The "feeling backward" of Heather Love's "Politics of Queer History" is no longer submerged in fear, misery, and loss but radiates hope, well-being, and joy. Emily's "rainbow joy" is now unambivalent queer joy.

Although there are clearly safe spaces in *Heartstopper*—Nick's and Charlie's bedrooms and the school's art room, for examples—like the chosen family, they too face challenges to protect those who are marginalized and so must be fluid and open to change in order not to get caught in the strangling coils of cyclical nature or history. Charlie's bedroom, in particular, is depicted as a queered safe space with its posters of Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, indie bands, and affirmations of resilience and resistance, even though it comes under threat from Charlie's traumatic past and from invasive and unsupportive parents, especially his mother. In the Netflix series, the art room has a tree painted on the wall by the window, a corner where Charlie (and later Charlie with Nick) takes refuge in the roots of the tree from bullies and their own traumatic responses to the past. Reflecting the seasonal colour changes of the leaves outside, this painting of the tree in the corner of the art room is a safe space that is both cyclical and open to non-linear changes as captured by Elle's painting, inspired by but not derivative of a painting she saw at the Louvre, of the art room with her supportive friend group when she transitioned and her life changed radically. Three of the most heartstopping moments in both the canonical and televised series are foregrounded against and in the vast sea: scenes that declare commitment to queer love and queer joy, despite potentially overwhelming heart-breaking challenges.[32] Windows in the school and the boys' bedroom as well as zoom-in/zoom-out shots of a number of the scenes visually reinforce this sense of a world outside vitally interconnecting with, but not consuming, a world inside. The teens' homes, their schools, the town centre, the bowling alley, parks, woods, and beaches where they meet and party become spaces traversed by Ahmed's "desire lines," blazing new paths of communication and connectivity and strengthening bonds of friendship, love, and community while hosting and generating moments of queer joy. The galaxies of Emily Byrd Starr's world have expanded exponentially, not chaotically, in Oseman's literary multiverse both canonically and paratextually.

## Digital and Physical Desire Lines and Possibility Models

That *Heartstopper* has forged and inspired new desire lines and possibility models is evidenced by the 10,744 pieces of fanfiction in *Archive of Our Own* (compared to 2,770 for *Anne of Green Gables* and 147 for *Emily of New Moon*).33 In her article on "Continuing Stories: L.M. Montgomery and Fanfiction in the Digital Era," Balaka Basu focuses on the *Emily* novels, observing that "fan writers are able to create critical dialogue with the originating author in acts of communal storytelling that incorporate allusions and reference points to which other dedicated fan readers and writers may respond." Basu argues that the *Emily* novels are particularly amenable to fanfiction because "Montgomery and her writer heroine Emily themselves engage in practices now associated with fanfiction" and that readers are therefore able "to engage in dialogue with the stories they love, a type of literary conversation that Montgomery herself models within her texts" (243). The *Heartstopper* novels and adaptations also incorporate journal entries (to convey the inner states of mind of both Nick and Charlie when Charlie is hospitalized and has no access to his mobile phone or the internet, for example) and show the importance of different kinds of dialogues that DMs, texting, group chats, and plain old-fashioned verbal conversations can have. Montgomery's and Oseman's works have blazed, and continue to blaze, new desire lines and possibility models in both the digital and physical print universes.

A recent example of the latter is Lefebvre's *In the Key of Dale*. As the back-cover promotion states, "For the fans of the Netflix series *Heartstoppe*r (based on the bestselling graphic novels by Alice Oseman) comes a disarming coming-of-age novel about a queer teen music prodigy who discovers pieces of himself in places he never thought to look." The novel begins with Dale attempting to write a diary, which he finds "can't answer me" (7), then attempting to frame his narrative for an uncongenial pen pal (8), an anonymous reader in the third person (9), and an unresponsive God (10). Dale turns to a hybrid of diary and epistolary forms in letters to his "Pa." He begins, "I read a book once about a character who kept 'writing it out' in a diary, and … I figured I had nothing to lose if I started 'typing it out' on my laptop." Unlike Emily, who experiments with various forms and audiences throughout the trilogy, Dale finds that because his father is at the root of why he needs someone to talk to and because he needs "someone who won't talk back," the letter/diary form is what works for him "right now" (11).

*In the Key of Dale* is a novel about a sixteen-year-old queer boy discarding his "cone of silence" and finding a voice, making himself visible in a world that is antagonistic to his differences, and beginning to heal himself as he works through the "bits and pieces" of his and his father's lives (294). Equally important, it is a coming-of-age story in which the young queer protagonist begins to find his own version of queer joy, a way to resist "no future" and believe in the yet unrealized future that will contribute to the desire lines being laid down for others to navigate. As Lefebvre says in a 2023 interview with Trevor Corkum, "Because coming-out stories, by their conventions, often end with the queer character embracing and declaring their non-dominant gender or sexual identity, after a while that gives the impression that coming out is the end of the queer protagonist's journey. But in many ways, it's just the beginning, and that's what I wanted to explore for Dale" (as does *Heartstopper*), and later, "It wasn't so much that I wanted to add some queer resistance to a heteronormative convention, since queer characters are just as deserving of happy endings (romantic or not) as straight characters. But I came to the conclusion that Dale—who's still waiting for his life to begin, who's self-aware that he has a lot of growing up left to do, and who's nervous about the fact that he's never really had a friend before—wouldn't believably see having a boyfriend as the solution to all his problems." It is this desire line, somewhat different from those in *Heartstopper*[34] (which Lefebvre acknowledges in this interview) that lays down yet another path and shares another possibility model, one more akin to the discoveries made by Oseman's aroace characters, Isaac in *Heartstopper* (Netflix) and Georgia in her most recent novel, *Loveless*, in reconciling to a life very different from societal expectations.

**Conclusion: Back to Our Futures**

Braidotti identifies one of the steps in the process of actualizing the "ethics of joy" as "a pragmatic engagement with the present in order to collectively construct conditions that transform and empower the capacity to act ethically and produce social horizons of hope and sustainable futures" ("Joy" 223). Anne's faith that the future—hers and those of some new order—will bring changes around the horizontally inclined "bend in the road" is diminished to a vanishing point by the end of *Rilla of Ingleside* and *The Blythes Are Quoted*. Happiness for the Blythe and Meredith families settles into satisfied complacency, one generation begetting the next, a protective fitting-in rather than true belonging. In the *Emily* trilogy, bends are replaced by panoramic—even galactic and intergalactic—vistas whereby futurity

becomes futurities. The “nexus of identity and imagined world building” (Wanzo 119) in works such as Montgomery’s *Emily* trilogy and Oseman’s *Heartstopper* graphic novels and adaptations occurs in heartstopping moments with the potential to transform hope and fear into a queer joy that resists and challenges the old orders of reproductive futurism dependent on concepts of binarized gender, sex, and sexuality and the cultures that have sustained them. Queer joy lays down desire lines that intersect and skew horizontal horizons and create multiversal spaces, new possibility models, that value the diversity of a shared humanity and respect for the non-human world. Listening to and sharing in the queer joy of one another’s expansive heartstopping moments is a portal back to our futures.

**About the Author**: Lesley D. Clement, past visiting scholar of the L.M. Montgomery Institute (UPEI) and currently a consulting editor of the *Journal of L.M. Montgomery Studies*, has held teaching and administrative positions at various Canadian universities. She has published on visual literacy, visual culture, empathy, death, and belonging and storytelling in picture books and Montgomery’s writings. Her work on Montgomery appears in *Studies in Canadian Literature*, *Journal of L.M. Montgomery Studies*, *L.M. Montgomery and the Matter of Nature(s)*, *L.M. Montgomery and Gender*, and *L.M. Montgomery’s* Emily of New Moon*: A Children’s Classic at 100*. She co-edited and contributed essays to *Children and Childhoods in L.M Montgomery: Continuing Conversations* (MQUP, 2022), *L.M. Montgomery’s Rainbow Valleys: The Ontario Years, 1911–1942* (MQUP, 2015), and *Global Perspectives on Death in Children’s Literature* (Routledge, 2016).

**Acknowledgements**: I would like to express appreciation to the editorial and administrative teams at the *Journal of L.M. Montgomery Studies* who shepherded this paper through its various stages. Thank you to Abby, Mina, Kate, Eve, Austen, Jane, and Lori. Thank you as well to the editorial peer reviewer who provided invaluable suggestions to make this a stronger paper.

- 1 The Human Rights Campaign is one of the world’s largest LGBTQ+ political advocacy and lobbying groups. See also endnote 26 for a reference to the award Locke was receiving and his speech.
- 2 Throughout *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed herself collapses happiness and joy, but the happiness she discusses in her conclusion has much in

common with joy, specifically queer joy.

- 3 In an article for Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, "Black Joy: Resistance, Resilience and Reclamation," Elaine Nichols writes, "At the heart of the Black Joy movement is what many scholars, journalists, authors, and others are describing as resistance, resilience, and reclamation of Black Humanity. … Black Joy is and has been an effective tool that has allowed individuals and groups to shift the impact of negative narratives and events in their favor" (nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/black-joy-resistance-resilience-and-reclamation). Michelle Obama's *Becoming* (Crown, 2018) and her 20 August 2024 Democratic National Convention speech (www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9zAk8t9qZ8) are both excellent examples of Black joy. The celebration of Indigenous joy emerged alongside reclaiming the joy found in Indigenous art and culture and, in Canada, is one path toward healing that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission opened up. As Steph Kwetásel'wet Wood, a Sḵwx̱wú7mesh journalist, wrote about National Truth and Reconciliation Day (29 September) in 2022 for *The Narwhal*, "Education around the ongoing colonial policies impacting Indigenous Peoples should take place all year, and the celebration of Indigenous joy and innovation too. We often carry joy in one hand and grief in the other" (thenarwhal.ca/newsletter-truth-reconciliation-conservation/).
- 4 For abstracts of these papers, see lmmontgomery.ca/sites/lmmontgomery.ca/files/2024.Abstracts%20%26%20Bios.LMM%2 .
- 5 Examples of these can be found in *L.M. Montgomery and War*, edited by Andea McKenzie and Jane Ledwell (McGill Queen's UP, 2017).
- 6 Brown references the work of Kristin Neff, *Fierce Self-Compassion: How Women Can Harness Kindness to Speak Up, Claim Their Power and Thrive* (HarperCollins, 2021), 38.
- 7 Ahmed, "Orientations" 553. She is "paraphrasing" Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (Vintage Books, 1997), 295. Ahmed explains in an endnote: "Becoming woman is about taking up the embodied situation of being woman, which takes time, as a way of projecting oneself in the world. If one 'becomes straight' then one 'takes up' the embodied situation of being straight, which also takes time" (572n24).
- 8 This count is based on a word search of the Gutenberg e-book version of *Rainbow Valley*, for which the 1919 Stokes edition was used to transcribe ( www.gutenberg.ca/ebooks/montgomery-rainbow/montgomery-rainbow-00-h-

dir/…).

- 9 For a discussion of this convention with reference to films, see James McConnaughy, “What Led to Lexa: A Look at the History of Media Burying Its Gays,” *The Mary Sue*, 29 Mar. 2016, www.themarysue.com/lexa-bury-your-gays/.
- 10 The best known of these complaint poems is “A Lover’s Complaint,” usually credited to Shakespeare. Contextualizing this poem with others that “bewail in moralistic terms the dangerous consequences of blind passion,” David Bevington observes that “Elizabethans often expected this sort of didacticism in the genre and might, indeed, have been tempted to read Shakespeare’s poem as a useful and moving object lesson to young women about the honeyed tongues of young wooers.” Bevington also notes how “A Lover’s Complaint” “goes far beyond the conventional demands of the genre”: “Framed successively and concentrically by the points of view of the sad maiden, the old man, the poet, and ourselves, the male wooer is given free rein of expression in pleading for sympathy” that provides the poem with a “tense and ultimately bitter struggle over sexuality that is so much a key to the ‘Dark Lady’ sonnets as well.” “A Lover’s Complaint,” *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, updated 4th edition, edited by David Bevington (Longman, 1997), 1654.
- 11 Considering the Jem-Faith and Walter-Una pairings from a strictly binary perspective in which the former are the more realistic heteronormative couple, the latter the impossible other-worldly pair, Lefebvre dismisses Walter’s “possible secret love for Faith” as “unlikely” (“Walter’s Closet” 18n8). I am not discussing Una here because Walter’s attraction to Faith may be Romantic, but his affection for Una is never any more than “comradely,” that of a brother (*RI* 164). Although Una’s unrequited, “secret, carefully-hidden fancy for Walter” (*RI* 32; cf. *RI* 89) may seem to align her with queer-coded “survivor lovers,” she never marries, and indeed, in *The Blythes Are Quoted*, she becomes an emblem of faithful grieving and hope dying (365–66, 376, 480–81) rather than of the lost opportunity of transformation through joy, queer or otherwise. She does not have the childhood vivacity and joy of her mother or sister (and certainly not of Mary); she is “not given to laughter,” has “wistful and sorrowful” eyes, and is “much more sensitive to public opinion than Faith,” even from a young age (*RV* 29). On her mission to appeal to Miss Cornelia to adopt Mary, Una hears the “joyous laughter” of the children in Rainbow Valley, “but her way lay not there” in completing her mission (*RV* 79). Her life’s mission is keeping the faith, but because rooted in loss and grief, with no joy to spark transformation, she

settles for a joyless life after Walter dies: “Una knew that love would never come into her life now … She had no right in the eyes of her world to grieve. She must hide and bear her long pain as best she could—alone. But she, too, would keep faith” (*RI* 250). Finally, as I argue in my *L.M. Montgomery and Gender* essay that develops Walter as a Homeric *kalos Thanatos* as filtered through Tennyson’s Arthurian poetry, Walter’s “war experiences have unleashed an unfitness of soul that would have prevented his ever returning home to marry Una—another Arthurian character who, by the end of Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, marries her Redcrosse Knight after rescuing him from despair and the temptations of escaping from life’s miseries through suicide” (“From ‘Uncanny Beauty’” 60).

- 12 An excellent discussion of this, relevant to the argument that I am making, can be found in Daniela Janes, “‘The Clock Is Dead’: Temporality and Trauma in *Rilla of Ingleside*,” *Canadian Literature*, vol. 244, 2021, pp. 125–43. (See especially, pp. 127–28, 138–40.) Janes demonstrates how “[t]he trauma of war has produced a subjective experience of temporal rupture” between “two irreconcilable worlds” in *Rilla*, situating this novel as an example of “the literature of aftermath” (127, 138) as defined by Philip D. Beidler in “The Great Party-Crasher: *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Great Gatsby*, and the Cultures of World War I Remembrance,” *War, Literature and the Arts*, vol. 25, 2013, pp. 1–23.
- 13 For a nuanced reading of unfeeling and unresponsive nature, see Maryam Khorasani, “‘A Fairy Realm of Romance’: Revising the Pastoral in Lucy Maud Montgomery’s *Rainbow Valley* and *Rilla of Ingleside*,” *Children’s Literature in Education* (2024), doi.org/10.1007/s10583-024-09577-9. This paper concludes: “Rather than reproducing the hierarchical man/nature dualism, the examined instances of personification establish the familiar non-human entities as worthy of care and respect, drawing on personification’s affective power to dismantle the anthropocentric tendencies of human mind and language.”
- 14 Lefebvre argues that Walter’s characterization as “in a sense, a child grown older,” someone who changes “very little,” aligns him with “the kind of *female* adolescent character” Montgomery felt restricted to continue writing about and with “atypical male” asexuality (“Walter’s Closet” 11, 15).
- 15 Clement, “From ‘Uncanny Beauty’” 54–56. The Gilbert quotation is from “Soldier’s Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War,” *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, edited by Margaret Randolph Higonnet, et al. (Yale UP, 1987), p. 198.

- 16 Hulan, “Bury Your Gays” 17. The “Bury Your Gays” trope is alluded to or mentioned specifically in much scholarship of queer literature and queer history. See, for examples, William P. Banks, “Literacy, Sexuality, and the Value(s) of Queer Young Adult Literatures,” *English Journal*, vol. 98, no. 4, 2009, pp. 33–36 (in particular p. 35); Andrew M. Butler, “Strange Boys, Queer Boys: Gay Representation in Young Adult Fantastic Fiction,” *Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Popular Fantasy: Beyond Boy Wizards and Kick-Ass Girls*, edited by Jude Roberts and Esther MacCallum-Stewart (Routledge, 2016), 53–67; Katelyn R. Browne, “Reimagining Queer Death in Young Adult Fiction,” *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*, vol. 2, no. 2 (January 2020), sophia.stkate.edu/rdyl/vol2/iss2/3; and (with reference to film) Lynne Stahl, “Chapter 10: Screening LGBTQ+,” *Introduction to LGBTQ+ Studies: A Cross-Disciplinary Approach*, edited by Deborah P. Amory et al., *Milne Open Textbooks*, 27 June 2022, milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/introlgbtqstudies/. See also Ahmed, *Promise* 88–89.
- 17 In contrast to this is Alice Winn’s *In Memoriam* (Vintage Books, 2024), a coming-of-age narrative of two gay First World War soldiers, Henry Gaunt and Sidney Ellwood, both of whom enlist underage, that is rooted in archival content, in particular the fictional *Preshutian* based on the real Marlborough College newspaper from 1913 to 1919, and so building what Ahmed refers to as an “unhappy queer archive” that “unhappiness can be affirmative; it can gesture toward another world, even if we are not given a vision of the world as it might exist after the walls of misery are brought down” (*Promise* 107). The novel tracks the loss of faith in the beauty and truth of “magical” England, as represented through its poetry (Tennyson being the main example), and although leaving the two men as wounded exiles in Brazil, ends with Ellwood quoting from Shakespeare’s Cordelia to her father in *King Lear*, “I cannot heave my heart into my mouth,” and Gaunt’s affirmation that this gesture is one of joy and hope: “It’s a start” (372–73).
- 18 Dean Priest would make a good study of someone incapable of experiencing joy or queer joy. He might “never [have] made the mistake of thinking gaiety was happiness,” but even though he thinks he understands the dynamics among Emily, Teddy, and Perry, which “left him a satisfied man” (*EQ* 52), his perspective is skewed by “heterosexual romantic fixations,” and as Slater suggests, his “otherness would be more productively considered through a disability lens” than queerness (156n1).

- 19 Ulanowicz cites two earlier articles that discuss this trauma: Kate Lawson, “Adolescence and the Trauma of Maternal Inheritance in L.M. Montgomery’s *Emily of New Moon*,” *Canadian Children’s Literature/Littérature canadienne pour la jeunesse*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1999, pp. 21–35; Lindsey McMaster, “The ‘Murray Look’: Trauma as a Family Legacy in L.M. Montgomery’s *Emily of New Moon*,” *Canadian Children’s Literature/Littérature canadienne pour la jeunesse*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2008, pp. 50–74.
- 20 Other examples include Dean’s verdict, “What a child! … I’ve never seen a creature who seemed so full of sheer joy of existence” (*ENM* 329); the narrator’s interjection when parsing Emily’s response to a magazine’s interest in her poetry, “This was one of her glorious moments. She felt a wonderful lightness of spirit—a soul-stirring joy in mere existence. The creative faculty … suddenly burned in her soul again like a purifying flame” (*EC* 154); and Emily’s recovering from her fall, when she feels “again her old joy in mere existence” ( *EQ* 68).
- 21 Epperly would concur. Discussing a passage near the end of *Emily’s Quest* when Emily is experiencing most keenly her loneliness and the emptiness of life because “her soul” could no longer find satisfaction in the “[i]mmortal, indestructible beauty beyond all the stain and blur of mortal passion” (260–61), Epperly distinguishes between Emily’s earlier flashes and what underpins the kind of creativity that Emily must now galvanize: “Emily’s interaction with beauty is no longer a sustained engagement that is sometimes lifted to rapture, but is instead a flat sameness visited occasionally by transport. The recurring of sudden rapture is not a life-sustaining engagement. A life-sustaining engagement involves a dailiness that will include pain and loneliness as well as rapture,” which Emily goes on to discover (220). The same observations could be applied to joy, specifically queer joy.
- 22 Heather Love uses the dismissive term “mere optimism” when contesting the “magical power,” “the power of queer alchemy” of the “politics of optimism [that] diminishes the suffering of queer historical subjects; at the same time, it blinds us to the continuities between past and present” (28–29). As seen earlier in this paper, Ahmed articulates the same misgivings about the “promise of happiness.” The definition of “queer joy” that I gave early in this paper and the examples of queer joy that I discuss—Montgomery’s and Oseman’s—would challenge Love’s and Ahmed’s verdict. That Montgomery’s reputation suffered due to the cultural and literary trends from the 1920s onward has been frequently discussed. An essay that covers this well within a Canadian context

of changing priorities and values is Kate Sutherland, “Advocating for Authors and Battling Critics in Toronto: Montgomery and the Canadian Authors Association,” in Bode and Clement, pp. 223–37. (See especially pp. 229–35 for the “gender politics” involved.)

- 23 We quote from Gatchalian’s “Anne Shirley Was the Best Friend a Queer Brown Boy Could Have,” 13 June 2019, electricliterature.com/anne-shirley-was-the-best-friend-a-queer-brown-boy-could-have/.
- 24 Ahmed, *Promise* 107. See endnote 17 for reference to Ahmed’s “unhappy queer archive.”
- 25 Oseman is active on social-media platforms such as X, Tumblr, and Instagram. The comments under her Instagram posting for 1 September 2024, captioned “Happy 8 years of Heartstopper,” include such praise as “[t]he world wouldn’t be the same without them; thank you so much for creating Nick and Charlie”; “To the story that changed our lives and saved us. A story that showed us that we are not alone”; “8 years of pure joy”; “Thank you, Alice, for 8 years of showing the world queer joy, love, support and acceptance”; “thank you for creating this beautiful universe that is so important to me and so many other people.” Examples are from the nearly eight-hundred comments six hours after Oseman posted (www.instagram.com/p/C_X0ySegQVC/).
- 26 GLAAD, the world’s largest LGBTQ+ media advocacy organization, has bestowed the past three “Outstanding Kids & Family Programming or Film—Live Action” awards on *Heartstopper* (2023, 2024, 2025). Joe Locke spoke of the impact that Oseman’s *Heartstopper* has had on multi-generational audiences in his acceptance speech for the Human Rights Campaign Impact Award on 1 February 2025, and he recommitted himself to doing the “right thing” (pun on “rights” intended?) rather than the “easy thing” ( www.youtube.com/watch?v=6x4bB_5Ym3Y).
- 27 A recent overview of this popularity and impact came in a *Sunday Times* article (1 Sept. 2024) that focused on one of the two then twenty-year-old actors who have been breakaway stars and are blazing new and different paths of queer representation: Joe Locke in a leading queer role in the Marvel universe (*Agatha All Along*, on Disney+, which aired 18 September 2024), a universe with only a few queer characters; and Kit Connor in a queered take on Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* that challenged binarized casting and played on Broadway 26 September 2024 to 16 February 2025. The *Sunday Times* article by Lotte Jeffs, “How Heartstopper Made Kit Connor Gen Alpha’s Favourite Pin-Up,” has this to say about the success of Oseman’s “wildly popular (more

than eight million books sold in 38 countries worldwide) graphic novel series": "The show—a cultural phenomenon that started in 2022 as a rose-tinted PG version of young queer love at secondary school, where hand-holding and the occasional kiss was as steamy as it got—has matured with [Connor]. Having become a Netflix Top Ten hit in 54 countries, it has captured the hearts of wide-eyed Gen Alpha and Zers and cynical boomers alike with its feelgood storylines" (www.thetimes.com/culture/tv-radio/article/heartstopper-kit-connor-netfl…). The dismissive tone of "rose-tinted" and "feelgood" demonstrates the point I made earlier about joy being trivialized as "mere optimism" since early in the twentieth century.

- 28 tapas.io/series/Heartstopper; Rhys 109 (ellipsis in original). The quotation is from Part Two of the novel, published originally in 1966, as a prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* "to interpret the colonial underpinning … [seen] from the perspective of white Creoles who have been displaced by a new wave of colonizers." The narrative comprises stories that are interrupted and lack closure, with none of them ever fitting together. See Angela Smith, "Introduction" to *Wide Sargasso Sea* (xvii, xxii). This passage is in Rochester's voice and reflects his inability to listen to the stories being told to him.
- 29 At the end of Volume 5 of *Heartstopper*, Oseman includes a calendar visual, "The Osemanverse Timeline," which establishes how the various volumes fit in chronologically from January of Year 1 (a new school year for Nick and Charlie) to June of Year 2. She also slots into the timeline where two of the standalone books fit: the novella *This Winter* (December of Year 1) and the novel *Solitaire* (January and February of Year 2). Notes are added that the other novella, *Nick and Charlie*, "occurs in the summer of Year 3" and that "*Heartstopper* doesn't take place in a specific real year." Tonally, the two novellas and the novel are much darker than *Heartstopper*, and although some scenes from *This Winter* were included in Season 3 of the Netflix adaptation (which aired 3 October 2024), as of 2 April 2025, Season 4 has yet to be announced, so whether anything from *Nick and Charlie* or *Solitaire* will be included is unknown. (Update: On 22 April 2025, it was announced that in lieu of a Season 4, *Heartstopper* would conclude with a feature film based on content from Volume 6 and the novella *Nick and Charlie*. The script has been written by Oseman, and filming will begin in summer 2025, starring Locke and Connor, who will be co-producers along with Oseman and others.)
- 30 As she completes pages from Volume 6, Oseman posts and makes them available for paying Patreon members. She started publishing early pages of

Volume 6 on Tapas and Tumblr on 1 October 2024.

- 31 In the Netflix adaptation, Isaac replaces Aled from the graphic novels. Because Oseman had already given Aled his own novel—*Radio Silence* (2017)—she could not fit his expanded story into the adaptation.
- 32 These are the scenes in which Nick declares his romantic attraction to Charlie, the Menorca holiday scene in which he seeks help to communicate to Charlie his concern about Charlie's eating disorder, and the scene in which Charlie tries to find courage to say "I love you," which is pre-empted by Nick's telling Charlie he is worried about his eating disorder. On 6 September 2024, Oseman posted on Instagram the title and an accompanying image of what will be her final chapter in the final volume (6) of *Heartstopper,* "Forever," with the sea in the background and shore in the foreground, the anticipated publication date being early 2026 (www.instagram.com/p/C_lEWfBpiZz/?img_index=1).
- 33 These were the counts on 2 April 2025.
- 34 Although *Heartstopper* profiles soulmates finding one another, it is made very clear that romantic love is not a solution to all problems, summed up in Volume 4 when Nick's mother says to her son, "knowing that … sometimes people need more support than just one person can give. That's love, darling" (170–71; ellipsis in original). She helps Nick make a plan to assist Charlie's journey to healing; as well, a list of "Mental Health Resources" is included at the end of the volume. The importance of a network of queer and straight allies is one of the most important messages of Netflix's Season 3 of *Heartstopper*.

Back to top

## Article Info

Creative Commons License

**Copyright: Lesley D. Clement, 2025.** This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (Creative Commons BY 4.0), which allows the user to share, copy, and redistribute the material in any medium or format and adapt, remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially, PROVIDED the Licensor is given attribution in accordance with the terms and conditions of the CC BY 4.0.

Peer reviewed
No

**Works Cited**


Ahmed, Sara. “Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2006, pp. 543–74.

---. *The Promise of Happiness*. Duke UP, 2010.

Basu, Balaka. “Continuing Stories: L.M. Montgomery and Fanfiction in the Digital Age.” Bode, Clement, Pike, and Steffler, pp. 242–56.

Bode, Rita, Lesley D. Clement, E. Holly Pike, and Margaret Steffler, eds. *Children and Childhoods in L.M. Montgomery: Continuing Conversations*. McGill-Queen’s UP, 2022.

Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. Basic Books, 2001.

Braidotti, Rosi. “Joy, Ethics of.” In *Posthuman Glossary*, edited by Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, pp. 221–23.

---. “Valedictory Lecture: We Are Rooted but We Flow.” *Future Humanities*, vol. 1, no. 34, 2023, pp. 1–12, onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/fhu2.4.

Brown, Brené, *Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience*. Random House, 2021.

---. *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone.* Vermilion, 2017.

Clement, Lesley D. “Emily Byrd Starr Meets Brené Brown: ‘Braving the Wilderness’ and Achieving ‘True Belonging.’” Du and Sanders 54–68.

---. “From ‘Uncanny Beauty’ to ‘Uncanny Disease’: Destabilizing Gender through the Deaths of Ruby Gillis and Walter Blythe and the Life of Anne Shirley.” *L.M. Montgomery and Gender*, edited by E. Holly Pike and Laura M. Robinson, McGill-Queen’s UP, 2021, pp. 44–67.

---. “L.M. Montgomery’s Precocious Children: Resisting Adult Narratives of Death, Dying, and the Afterlife.” Bode, Clement, Pike, and Steffler, pp. 47–67.

Clement, Lesley D., and Margaret Steffler. “Preface to the Afterwords.” Bode, Clement, Pike, and Steffler, pp. 277–83.

Corkum, Trevor. “The Chat with Benjamin Lefebvre.” *49th Shelf*, 26 Jan. 2023, 49thshelf.com/Blog/2023/01/27/The-Chat-with-Benjamin-Lefebvre.

Du, Yan, and Joe Sutliff Sanders, eds. *L.M. Montgomery’s* Emily of New Moon*: A Children’s Classic at 100*. UP of Mississippi, 2024.

Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Duke UP, 2004.

Epperly, Elizabeth. “*Emily’s Quest*: L.M. Montgomery’s Green Alternative to Despair and War?” *L.M. Montgomery and War*, edited by Andrea McKenzie and Jane Ledwell, McGill-Queen’s UP, 2017, pp. 214–34.

Gatchalian, C.E. *Double Melancholy: Art, Beauty, and the Making of a Brown Queer Man*. Arsenal Press, 2019.

Hulan, Haley. “Bury Your Gays: History, Usage, and Context.” *McNair Scholars Journal*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2017, pp. 17–27.

Lefebvre, Benjamin. Afterword. L.M. Montgomery, *The Blythes Are Quoted*, pp. 511–20.

---. *In the Key of Dale*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2022.

---. “Walter’s Closet.” *Canadian Children’s Literature/Littérature canadienne pour la jeunesse*, vol. 94, Summer 1999, pp. 7–20.

Lothian, Alexis. *Old Futures: Speculative Fiction and Queer Possibility*. New York UP, 2018.

Love, Heather. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. 2007. Harvard UP, 2009.

Montgomery, L.M. *Anne of Green Gables*. 1908. Tundra, 2014.

---. *The Blythes Are Quoted*. Viking, 2009.

---. *Emily Climbs*. 1925. Tundra, 2014.

---. *Emily of New Moon*. 1923. Tundra, 2014.

---. *Emily’s Quest*. 1927. Tundra, 2014.

---. *Rainbow Valley*. 1919. Tundra, 2021.

---. *Rilla of Ingleside*. 1921. Tundra, 2014.

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York UP, 2009.

Oseman, Alice. "Alice Oseman Discusses 'Solitaire' and 'Heartstopper.'" *Big Gay Fiction Podcast*, Episode 420, 8 May 2023, www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEaW7xd4j4k. Transcript: jeffandwill.com/biggayfictionpodcast/2023/05/08/episode-420-alice-oseman-discusses-solitaire-and-heartstopper/.

---. *Heartstopper*. Volumes 1–5. Scholastic, 2018–2023. (Volume 6 forthcoming; pages that are ready are available on Patreon with paid membership.)

---. *Loveless*. HarperCollins, 2020.

---. *Nick and Charlie*. 2015. HarperCollins, 2020.

---. *Radio Silence*. 2017. HarperCollins, 2019.

---. *Solitaire*. 2014. HarperCollins, 2018.

---. *This Winter*. 2015. HarperCollins, 2020.

Oseman, Alice, writer, creator, and executive producer. *Heartstopper*. Netflix, 2022–ongoing.

Pearce, Ruth. "Trans Visibility, Modelling Possibility." *Dr. Ruth Pearce*, 31 Mar. 2021, ruthpearce.net/2021/03/31/trans-visibility-modelling-possibility/.

Rhys, Jean. *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Penguin, 1997.

Robinson, Kelley. "HRC President Speaks at the 2025 Greater New York Dinner." 3 Feb. 2025, www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWUGaUQx2nI.

Robinson, Laura. "Bosom Friends: Lesbian Desire in L.M. Montgomery's Anne Books." *Canadian Literature*, vol. 180, Spring 2004, pp. 12–28.

Slater, Katharine. "'A Ghost You Can *Feel* and *Hear* but Never See': Queer Hauntings in *Emily of New Moon*." Du and Sanders, pp. 144–58.

Ulanowicz, Anastasia. “Emily’s Afterlives: Trauma, Repetition, and (Re)Reading in *Emily of New Moon* and *Russian Doll*.” Du and Sanders, pp. 203–18.

Wanzo, Rebecca. “Futurity.” *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, *Third Edition*, edited by Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, New York UP, 2020, pp. 119–22.

Waterston, Elizabeth. “Leaskdale: L.M. Montgomery’s *Rainbow Valley*.” *L.M. Montgomery’s Rainbow Valleys: The Ontario Years*, 1911–1942, edited by Rita Bode and Lesley D. Clement, McGill-Queen’s UP, 2015, pp. 21–32.

**Banner image**: Rainbow at Cape Bear, Prince Edward Island. Tourism PEI/Shirley Gallant.