LMM 150 Tribute: Flowery Passages, Golden Picnics, Golden Roads, and Golden Roses

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A tribute for the 150th anniversary of L.M. Montgomery's birthday, this celebratory essay explores flowers in Montgomery's fiction, how Montgomery's utilization of flowers may influence characters' and readers' lives, and the many types of literal and figurative "flowery passages" experienced by fans of her work.

When Aunt Mary Maria overstays her welcome at Ingleside, Anne sets aside her own grudging feelings and throws Aunt Mary Maria a spectacular 55th birthday party, symbolized by, among other things, a basket of "fifty-five golden roses" (*AIn*, Ch. 24, par. 59).1 Sadly for Aunt Mary Maria, though happily for the glad-to-see-the-back-of-her Blythes, she interprets the gesture as a flaunting of her age and storms out of town in a huff and a tizzy.

Personally, I don't think Lucy Maud Montgomery would have minded that basket of roses so much. She was very fond of flowers.

So, it seems fitting as we celebrate the 150th anniversary of L.M. Montgomery's birth, LMM 150, to think of golden roses and golden roads, birthdays and new beginnings, transitions and celebrations of every kind. It is a time to rejoice for all kindred spirits who have found ourselves in her work, found one another because of her work, and live in a world beautified by the golden-rose coloured glasses L.M. Montgomery's words grant to us . . . a world that would never have existed if she had never set pen to paper.

Just think of it!

Then again, I'd rather not. I'd rather celebrate 150 years of L.M. Montgomery-ness!

Happy Birthday, LMM!

Doesn't it feel very Montgomeryish to mark the occasion—and, indeed, all occasions—with flowers? Which kind shall we choose?

Will it be the daffodils eschewed by Aunt Mary Maria, but "famous all around the harbour" in Anne's Ingleside years (*AIn*, Ch. 14, par. 15)? Is Montgomery, as Rilla is implied to be, the sort who "understood what daffodils are thinking" and would want them at this virtual birthday party (*AIn*, Ch. 34, par. 4)? Or should we choose a bunch of bonnie red geraniums, like the Bonny who started it all, the first flower Anne adopts as someone truly belonging to Green Gables, before she even knows she does (*AGG*, Ch. 4, pars. 32–36)? Perhaps it should be the violets of Violet Vale (*AGG*, Ch. 15, par. 5). Or an iris like the one carried by Anne-as-makeshift-Lily-Maid (*AGG*, Ch. 28, par. 14). Maybe LMM would enjoy a collection of narcissi like the ones in Hester Gray's garden, "like moonshine and sunshine combined," since Anne once said, during the "Golden Picnic" celebrating her own birthday, that the garden and its story were a "birthday gift" to her from the garden itself (*AA*, Ch. 13, pars. 51, 58). Perhaps a big bunch of lily-of-the-valley would make LMM's heart sing, in honour of the little bouquet that Gilbert sends to Anne for their convocation day (*AIs*, Ch. 37, par. 30). Or maybe some pink roses would be best. Roses grow in Hester Gray's garden, too. Anne has been known to say, "the only real roses are the pink ones … They are the flowers of love and faith," and Anne carries roses on her own wedding day (*AIs*, Ch. 29, par. 1; *AHD*, Ch. 4, par. 17). To be fair, the colour of those roses is never specified. But given her previous sentiment, one might imagine they'd be pink.[2]

Then again, they might be white. Elizabeth Waterston once wrote of the "wee Scotch rose" that Matthew's mother brought over from Scotland, saying, "[t]hat tiny, cultivated rose suggests—as everything good in a garden does—the continuity of the past, the survival of love over the years" (302). Isn't that exactly what L.M. Montgomery creates and represents for so many of us? So, too, our love for her and her work endures. Maybe, then, some white roses like that "wee Scotch rose."

Truly, the list of Anneish flowers could go on for years, as does our memory of Montgomery.

Please try not to cry if I just say, "mayflowers."

Or should we go further afield from Anne and her kin, and choose the red roses of Valancy's shrub, "[g]reat crimson, velvety blossoms. Fragrant. Glowing. Wonderful," the ones she prunes so harshly only to discover the shrub bursting with newfound life a short time later, just like herself (*BC*, chs. 7 and 27). Maybe LMM would like a bushel of buttercups—"how glorious that miracle of buttercups"—of the sort that

inspires Emily Starr to write poetry (*ENM*, Ch. 10, par. 48). Perhaps she'd enjoy some dahlias like those in the Halifax Public Gardens, as Sarah Emsley discusses in her blog? Perchance she'd enjoy some wild poppies, like the ones Adriana Pacheco mentions in her post, "Anne and Flowers," which in turn draws upon Carolyn Strom Collins and Christina Wyss Eriksson's landmark *Anne of Green Gables Treasury*. She might "fancy" some pansies like those Caroline Stellings paints for her own tribute to Montgomery, "Fancies." Or would she prefer the "roses and poppies; hollyhocks and peonies" or the "bleeding hearts, peonies, columbines, and roses" spoken of so eloquently by Abby Chandler in her conference essay on Montgomery, which traces how Montgomery pined for a garden for many years, and finally had one when she secured a home of her own?3

So many beautiful moments marked by flowers.

Of course, I haven't even begun to talk about the journals because my heart tends to fiction. Fiction and flowers, that's my way to celebrate Montgomery's birthday.

So, my choice, here and now, to mark the occasion, will be a basket of the aforementioned golden roses, for our golden anniversary with LMM thrice over. And perhaps one other fateful, faithful bloom: I will choose, too, branches of apple blossoms. Not only are they a personal favourite, and the state flower of my home state of Michigan, but they hold a special place in Montgomery lore on at least two counts. They carry us back to the King orchard, the place where tales and trees intertwine, which bespeaks Montgomery's writerly world if ever a metaphor-made-literal did: "the orchard blossomed not only apple blossoms but all the love, faith, joy, pure happiness and pure sorrow of those who had made it and walked there" (*SG*, Ch. 5, par. 61).

But apple blossoms also mark that first journey of Anne to Green Gables and, therefore, of Anne and Montgomery to us. Apple blossoms bring Anne into our lives. I choose them to celebrate the arrival of LMM into the world and into our lives.

It's not the first time I've thought about those particular flowers or that particular moment in Montgomery's work. Back in 2005—wow, Aunt Mary Maria isn't the only one who's getting old!—I wrote an essay about landscape in *Anne of Green Gables* where I argued that Anne arrives at Green Gables by passing through two different "flowery passages" at once: the literal passageway of arched flowering trees that Anne christens "the White Way of Delight," and the fanciful, flowery prose that describes it (*AGG*, Ch. 2, par. 53; Frever 55–57). When I say "flowery prose," I mean that in both the literal and figurative senses. Montgomery's nature passages are, of course, richly evocative and full of description. But they are also full of flowers: references to flowers, descriptions of flowers, memories of flowers, friendships with

flowers. So, when Mr. Harrison later counsels Anne to revise her writing by "cut[ting] out all those flowery passages," we may recognize a lack of wisdom in his statement (*AIs*, Ch. 12, par. 44; Frever, 55–57). I believe so, and I stand by my argument from way back when.4 Because where would we be without those flowery passages? In a much greyer world, in my opinion. True, too many flowery passages can weigh a book down, so there may be some seed of wisdom in Mr. Harrison's words. Indeed, there may be Montgomery readers who could do with fewer flowers on the whole. But if we didn't have any flowery passages, Anne wouldn't be here at all. She arrives to Avonlea—and to us—via the flowery passage in her journey and the flowery passage in the book that describes her, both of which bring her to us, her grateful readers. Without flowery passages, where would we be? In a world without Anne. Who wants that? Few in Avonlea and few in the world beyond, I'd wager. No devotee of *Anne of Green Gables*, that's for certain.

One thing that occurs to me now, though, is that Montgomery gives us, creates for us, far more types of flowery passages than I appreciated at the time. Because in the interim, I've been working on the "Your LMM Story" project with Kate Scarth, and we have been granted the great and glorious gift of getting to read other people's L.M. Montgomery origin stories: the tales of how they discovered her work and world, and how this experience shapes their lives. As Kate and I receive and read these stories individually, and then discuss what we discover there, I realize there are far more metaphorical flowery passages than I ever before knew.

Montgomery uses flowers to mark rites of passage in the books, as with the convocation and wedding mentioned above, or when Aunt Mary Maria leaves and the Blythes get their lives back once again. That's a type of flowery passage.

In turn, we may carry Montgomery in our hearts as we make transitions in our own lives. Isn't that, too, another kind of flowery passage? Montgomery's worldview adorns our lives, just as Anne adorned a table with flowers for Mrs. Allan, and when that worldview interweaves imperceptibly into our own, the comfort of her words—and her characters—walk beside us, lending us strength to move into the next phase of our life (*AGG*, Ch. 21, par. 27). Our rites of passage—and writes of passage—are adorned with flowers of Montgomery's co-creation. Whether we go forth from mourning or into morning, Montgomery walks beside us on our road, and she bedecks that journey with blossoms.

Side Path: Though I won't go into detail here of which particular reader LMM stories from the project lead me to this view, those references and these ideas are already growing together into a chapter in Kate's and my book-in-progress: *Your LMM Story: The World of L.M. Montgomery and Her Fans*. Let's not call it a Spoiler

Alert. Let’s call it an early glimpse of a springtime garden, ready to burst into bloom. But fear not if you missed the chance to send us your story. We’re planning to reopen our survey to more voices, more stories, and more flowery passages as the project continues to unfold.

But back to our main path, our flowery journey together: aren’t the very avenues of invitation—the way Montgomery somehow allows us into her work, and allows us to bring inspirations from it back into our lives—another kind of flowery passage? While a literal road through flowers brought Anne to Green Gables, while a passage of flowery prose brought Anne to us, while Anne and Montgomery and all Montgomery’s characters—and the flowers and life lessons they carry—may carry us through our journeys in life, our rites of passage, isn’t our ability to move back and forth from the world of the novel and our own a flowery passage, too? Sabrina Marks has spoken compellingly about how Montgomery creates “ambiguities” that allow readers of many different cultures entry into the books, even when the portrayals within the books can be prejudicial or problematic (Marks, “Montgomery’s,” and Marks, “Whose Home?” panel discussion). These points of entry, these paths and channels of access, could also be characterized as flowery passages. Isn’t entering into the world of Montgomery a little like walking down a flower-strewn aisle into a world that is somehow both new and familiar, both hers and our very own? Isn’t this quest into literature-land, when done the Montgomery way, also a flowery passage?

Finally, for now—for I’m sure many more concepts of flowery passages will occur to me and to you long after these words are fixed on their pages—aren’t the connections between and among Montgomery fans flowery passages too? Just as beloveds walk flowered aisles to flowered altars to say their vows, when kindred spirits connect to one another, when we exchange words and ideas and stories that are soaked in love and flowers, aren’t those exchanges—those passings back and forth of words and ideas and friendship and love—aren’t those flowery passages too?

It seems to me now that getting to share our thoughts and feelings about Montgomery with one another, and with the world, is a special kind of magic. It is as if every day were an anniversary of the day we found Montgomery … and ourselves, and one another. All of these flowery passages become the roads that we travel to reach one another: the markers, not only of our transitions, but of our connections. The connections between us are adorned, embellished, and enhanced by our mutual love of Montgomery, her books and her worldview, and our way is strewn with flowers. Thus, every day becomes a flowery passage into the future, a passage that we travel together, in kinship.

I feel so very grateful to have your company for this journey. Shall we look around, beside us? I suspect Montgomery is walking there, and Anne, and Emily, and Sara Stanley, and Valancy, and so many others, including all the Avonlea, Rainbow Valley, and King Orchard small fry. For time is fluid and bending in the world of books, where Anne is young again every time we read her so. We can all gather together, writers and readers and characters, past and present and ever-eternal, on this golden-hued journey both away and back again, ever assured that wherever we are walking, wherever these passages may lead or whatever they may bring, we are never quite alone. We have one another, the books, and the flowers, all at once and all together, in a once upon a time that is forever.

As Montgomery put it:

> Once upon a time we all walked on the golden road. It was a fair highway, through the Land of Lost Delight; shadow and sunshine were blessedly mingled, and every turn and dip revealed a fresh charm and a new loveliness to eager hearts and unspoiled eyes.
>
> On that road we heard the song of morning stars; we drank in fragrances aerial and sweet as a May mist; we were rich in gossamer fancies and iris hopes; our hearts sought and found the boon of dreams; the years waited beyond and they were very fair; life was a rose-lipped comrade with purple flowers dripping from her fingers.
>
> We may long have left the golden road behind, but its memories are the dearest of our eternal possessions; and those who cherish them as such may haply find a pleasure in the pages of this book, whose people are pilgrims on the golden road of youth." (*GR*, foreword, par. 1–3)

Thank you, L.M. Montgomery. Thank you for all the flowery passages in all their glory. Thank you for the golden roses and the golden roads. We offer them back to you, in gratitude and friendship. Happy Birthday.

About the Author: Trinna S. Frever is a fiction writer and scholar who holds a bachelor’s degree in two fields (English and Psychology) from the University of Michigan and master’s and doctoral degrees in English from Michigan State University. Frever’s creative and scholarly interests intertwine, focusing on interconnections among oral storytelling, music, dance, visual arts, print fiction, and

the ceaseless boundaries of imagination. An established Montgomery scholar, Frever has presented at 11 L.M. Montgomery Institute conferences, published more than seven essays on Montgomery's work, and taught UPEI's signature course on L.M. Montgomery. Frever's current Montgomery project, together with Kate Scarth, explores readers' personal responses to Montgomery's work. Learn more at trinnawrites.com and yourlmmstory.com.

Banner Image: Left - from *Anne of Green Gables: A Graphic Novel*, adapted by Mariah Marsden, illustrated by Brenna Thummler, Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2017. Right - from *Anne Arrives*, adapted by Kallie George, pictures by Abigail Halpin, Tundra Books, 2019.

- 1 I cite the works of L.M. Montgomery using chapter and paragraph rather than page number for specific reasons. There are so many different editions of Montgomery's works at this stage—including audio and digital versions—that I feel page numbers muddle, rather than expedite, the research process. Further, assuming all fans of Montgomery read the books in print form reinscribes the ties between print and colonization. Chapter numbers, by contrast, open the field to a broader range of textual forms and learning modalities.
- 2 When Anne makes comments such as "the flowers of love and faith," one might rightly wonder if she is drawing on nineteenth-century or early twentieth-century concepts of flower meanings, which ascribe particular emotional or relationship connotations to particular flowers based on type, colour, and so on. My research, using this example, suggests that Montgomery's flower associations pertain more to her characters' personalities, in-text associations, and narrative histories than to external sources. Kate Greenaway's popular *The Language of Flowers* (1884), for example, contains no references to pink roses, likely because "pink" is used primarily as a term for carnations rather than as a colour within its pages. Henrietta Dumont's 1851 *The Language of Flowers: The Floral Offering* likewise omits pink roses, again grouping "pinks" alongside carnations as a flower variety, rather than a colour (77, 91). The 2011 volume *A Victorian Flower Dictionary* by Mandy Kirkby, lists "grace" as the meaning of a pink rose (129, 176). S. Theresa Dietz's *The Complete Language of Flowers* lists

over 40 meanings for pink roses and for roses generally, and while “love” makes the list, “faith” does not (186-190). Finally, the tried-and-true *Farmer’s Almanac* lists “happiness” as the primary meaning for a pink rose (Boeckmann). Collectively, these references suggest that Anne comes to her interpretations on her own. In my interpretation, this portrayal is consistent with Montgomery’s use of flowers throughout her works, wherein the meanings are contextualized based on the experiences and narrative histories of the characters, as seen through the examples here.

- 3 Recognizing Montgomery’s strong connection to flowers and her own gardens, several Montgomery historical sites and societies endeavour to create or maintain Montgomery gardens. I particularly enjoy these photos of the Lucy Maud Montgomery Heritage Garden in Norval: www.facebook.com/LMMontgomeryHeritageSociety/posts/the-lucy-maud-montgo…. For more on Montgomery’s manses, gardens, and their surroundings, see *Lucy Maud Montgomery: Norval*, lmmontgomerynorval.com and for Leaskdale, *The Official Website of the Lucy Maud Montgomery Society of Ontario*, lucymaudmontgomery.ca/tours/the-manse/.
- 4 I must admit that it feels a bit odd to cite myself, and yet even with the strangeness, I do so for two reasons. One, because Montgomery Studies is a field that is so blessedly abundant that it’s just not possible for everyone to read everything, and I recognize that older works published afar may fade from view. Two and too, so that readers can see the development of my thinking about Montgomery and her works over time and the spinning of my different thoughts around the same themes. As we all know, it’s not as though ideas stop when you put them on the page or on the screen. For me, and I’m guessing for most of us, they continue to grow and develop new branches, even after their first flowering, and sometimes, after resting dormant for several springtimes, they come suddenly into bloom. Please accept these references in that spirit.

Article Info

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