A Cat of One’s Own: The Woman Writer and the Feline Companion in Emily of New Moon

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Using an animal studies lens, this essay analyzes the role of cats and kittens in *Emily of New Moon* and draws connections to the solitary path of the female writer. The literary representation of cats gives us a human-mediated view of animal experience and consciousness, inviting us to reflect on the kinds of stories that are told about animals.

In L.M. Montgomery’s 1923 novel, *Emily of New Moon*, the protagonist Emily Byrd Starr is repeatedly aligned with cats in ways that suggest both her capacity to see their value and, by implication, her ability to assert her own value in a family context in which she feels unwanted or superfluous.1 The novel teems with cats and kittens: Mike and Saucy Sal are Emily’s beloved companions during her childhood days in the little house in the hollow; Saucy Sal joins Emily as a fellow sojourner at New Moon Farm;2 and later, Mike II and Daffy delight Emily with their frolicsome charms. Elizabeth Barnes notes that in the nineteenth-century American female *Bildungsroman*, “kittens and girls create and define each other, even as both are created and defined by a largely patriarchal, capitalist, and hegemonic culture ambivalent about the terms on which females and felines are to be valued.”3 In this analysis, I consider the implications of these acts of mutual definition in Montgomery’s female *Künstlerroman*, examining Emily’s sympathetic relationship with cats and kittens as a rejection of patriarchal values and systems of meaning.

Emily's cats are treasured companions and also models for her own willful and creative spirit. They kindle something in the fledgling writer, sparking Emily's compassion and creativity, as well as her recognition of the necessity of the writer's essential solitariness. In her pursuit of her vocation, Emily must embrace aloneness and become like the cat who walks by itself.[4]

Drawing on Mary Rubio's claim that Montgomery's novel encodes a "counter-text of rebellion" through its focus on Emily's "negotia[tions] with a patriarchal society which discourages female self-hood and individuality,"[5] I argue that in challenging the contested value of kittens and cats, Montgomery challenges the contested value of girls and women. Through Emily's and the novel's strategies of representing animals, cats are aligned with a range of positive associations, including language, creativity, and sympathy, while the negative associations—particularly with sexual desire and unregulated reproduction—are subverted. Montgomery connects Emily's capacious and sympathetic view of cats to other ways in which she interprets her environment generously and creatively, re-evaluating abandoned daughters, absent mothers, disappointed houses, and superfluous kittens. Emily's own process of re-evaluation implicitly argues for the importance of the dispossessed, unwanted, and abandoned, whether female or feline.

Throughout *Emily of New Moon*, cats are associated with wildness and individualism and, alternatively, with the cozy domesticity of hearth and home. As Montgomery challenges, complicates, and reworks the moral freighting and symbolic role of cats, the one constant is the connection between cats and creativity. Building on recent Montgomery scholarship that analyzes her nuanced and sensitive representation of domestic animals, I examine how the text rhetorically constructs the figure of the cat, drawing connections between the literary representation of felines in *Emily of New Moon* and the woman writer's quest for creative freedom and economic, social, and intellectual independence.

Victorian Pets

Sarah Amato, in *Beastly Possessions: Animals in Victorian Consumer Culture*, observes that "human relationships to and understandings of animals are historically and culturally contingent," reflecting assumptions not only about animal nature but also about human nature, gender, class, race, and empire. In her examination of Victorian pet keeping, animal breeding, zoo collections, and the taxidermic afterlives of animals, Amato traces the commodification of creatures in the nineteenth and

early twentieth century and unpacks the multiple roles played by animals in their interactions with humans. As Amato observes, a single animal could play multiple and shifting roles across its life: “a creature could be captured and sold as a commodity and transformed into a pet”; then in its role as a pet, “the animal could serve as a companion as well as a living parlour decoration and evidence of household social and moral status.” A pet could moreover shift from a living entity to a reproduction, as it “could be illustrated or painted by an artist and transformed into a representation.”6 Finally, in death an animal could be preserved, like the creatures Emily encounters at Wyther Grange, the home of her Great-Aunt Nancy, which include the “case of sweet little stuffed humming birds” and, more ominously, the “pickled snake in a big glass jar” that horrifies and fascinates Emily.7 While animal studies scholars seek “the material traces of animals in order to recover animals as historical actors in their own right,”8 the literary representation of creatures gives us a human-mediated view of animal experience and consciousness, inviting us to reflect on the kinds of stories that are told about animals.

Described by British social anthropologist Edmund Leach as a “man-animal,” the pet occupies a liminal position between the world of humans and the world of animals.9 Erica Fudge, building on Leach, describes the pet as a “boundary breaker,” noting pets have literally “crossed over from outside to inside,” and challenge binaristic thinking by being “like [humans] and not like us simultaneously.”10 Keith Thomas observes that by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, pets had become a “normal feature of the [English] middle-class household.” Thomas’s definition of a “pet” as an animal that was “allowed into the house,” “given an individual personal name,” and “never eaten,” reflects the privileged role of the pet relative to other domestic animals and the association between pet keeping and sentimental attachment.11 As Katherine Grier explains, “the most important quality pets share is that they have been singled out by human beings.”12

Among Victorian pets, the cat possessed a complex reputation. Harriet Ritvo, in *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian* Age, observes that “[t]he most frequently and energetically vilified domestic animal was the cat,” a creature disparaged for its self-sufficiency and perceived lack of loyalty to its human owner.13 In *Zoological Recreations* (1847), the English naturalist William Broderip begins his chapter on cats with an epigraph from *Macbeth* (“I come, Graymalkin!”), echoing Shakespeare’s linking of women, witches, and felines. While noting that historical men like “Mahomet, Montaigne, Richelieu, and Johnson” have shown their

“fondness for these luxurious quadrupeds,” Broderip suggests, “[i]f dogs are the friends of mankind, their companions in their walks, and their partners in the pleasures of the chase, cats may be considered as the chosen allies of womanhood.”[14] This association between women and cats negotiates a number of contradictions. Amato observes a degree of ambivalence whereby the Victorian cat is simultaneously viewed as “strong-willed, independent, and promiscuous,” as well as “feeble and self-destructive,” offering the possibility that it “could somehow be reformed into a more ideal and dependent pet.”[15]

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, the social value of cats was being energetically advanced through the organization of cat shows, which promoted a taxonomic approach to felines—the first such show took place at the Crystal Palace in July 1871—and the creation of middle-class organizations like the National Cat Club, founded in 1887, which sought to remedy the poor reputation of cats.[16] In the preface to *Our Cats and All About Them* in 1889, Harrison Weir, a British natural history artist who was both an organizer and judge at the first cat show and later president of the National Cat Club, describes the bias he once held against cats before coming to see them as “the most perfect, and certainly the most domestic” of animals. Acknowledging that “[l]ong ages of neglect, ill-treatment, and absolute cruelty, with little or no gentleness, kindness, or training, have made the Cat self-reliant,” Weir proposes that “from this emanates the marvellous powers of observation, the concentration of which has produced a state analogous to reasoning, not unmixed with timidity, caution, wildness, and a retaliative nature.”[17] Montgomery’s representation of cats and other creatures is, as Idette Noomé argues, “partially conditioned by discourses about animals in her time and partially a personal choice that is in dialogue with those discourses.”[18] Montgomery’s “reformation” of the figure of the cat in *Emily of New Moon* does not lie in training her fictional cats into virtuous forms but instead in proposing the affinity between the developing female writer and the cat that charts its own independent path on the border of domesticity. In this space of competing signification where the Victorian cat is imagined alternately as a “model of feminine virtue” and an “incarnation of female vice,”[19] Montgomery crafts her vision of the cat as a model for the solitariness and self-possession of the woman writer.

Animal Biography

In *Emily of New Moon*, her "portrait of the artist as a young girl,"[20] Montgomery captures Emily's bright glance as it observes the world around her, transforming the moment of observation into written form. Emily, like the cat, possesses what Weir calls "marvellous powers of observation,"[21] and both girl writer and cat are framed as witnesses of the everyday. As a child writer, Emily works in a range of genres that includes sketches, poems, and letters, as well as animal biography. In the opening chapter, the narrator notes the last entry young Emily has made in her yellow account book is her cat Mike's "Biograffy."[22] In *Animal Biography: Re-framing Animal Lives*, André Krebber and Mieke Roscher contend that the form of "a biography … projects, almost by definition, the possession of emotions, personhood—a self," such that "biographical writing surfaces both as an approach to capture the individuality of animals as well as make animals visible as individuals."[23] Animal biographies differ from animal autobiographies, such as those published during the rise of the Humane Movement—for example, Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877) and Margaret Marshall Saunders's *Beautiful Joe* (1893)—which present the animal's experience in the first person, or the work of writers such as Ernest Thompson Seton and Charles G.D. Roberts, who, with varying degrees of plausibility, attempt to represent animal subjectivity.[24] In contrast, animal biography is "external to the cognitive experience of the animals' worlds and their relations to it," foregrounding, instead, the human perception of animal selfhood.[25]

The animal biography subverts the gender and species hierarchies that privilege the stories of great men by telling the stories of individual and individualized animals. It is noteworthy that Montgomery's journals offer embedded mini-biographies of her feline acquaintances. She recalls that she and her cousin Frede "always loved cats," reflecting that this was strange because "our fathers and mothers and our grandfathers and grandmothers on both sides detested them." Writing of her cat Daff (whose name she later gives to one of Emily's kittens) on 4 January 1919, Montgomery observes he "has his own odd ways." For example, he dislikes petting and "seems to resent it, even from me."[26] In the same reflection on well-loved cats, she describes the life of Frede's long-lived pet, Maggie, a cat that "had more brains, emotion, and personality than quite a few humans have." She recalls Maggie's "absolutely uncanny" eyes, which "haunt me to this day." Montgomery reflects, "[t]hey were not the eyes of an animal—they were *human* eyes," adding "[v]erily, it is hard *not* to believe that Maggie had a soul."[27]

Montgomery's recognition of animal sentience in her journals is reflected in how she writes about animal lives in her fiction. Her literary cats are particularized, like the individual cats she knew in life. Not limited to purring lap-cats and gamboling kittens, Montgomery creates space for the weird, the aloof, and even the unlovable cat, reflecting the personalities, caprices, and capacities of real cats in her fictional felines, such as the mutable Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in *Rilla of Ingleside* and the glamourous Snowball in *Jane of Lantern Hill*. Montgomery adopted the silhouette of a cat as part of her signature; dedicated a novel, *Jane of Lantern Hill*, to her cat Lucky, "[t]he charming affectionate comrade of fourteen years"; and, as Noomé observes, across her body of work repeatedly gave her human characters her own pleasure in feline companionship.[28] Montgomery's empathic view of cats, reflected in her life writing and in her fiction, is echoed in Emily's attitude toward her companion animals. Like Montgomery, Emily shapes the figure of the domestic cat in terms that privilege creativity, language, aesthetics, pleasure, and beauty.

Training Cats and Creative Girls

At the beginning of *Emily of New Moon*, the companionable role played by Emily's two cats is recognized even by the stolid housekeeper, Ellen Greene, who allows Emily to have her pets at hand while eating supper; however, this companionship introduces an element of subversion. Ellen's mysterious concession to cats at the table is belatedly revealed to be motivated by compassion for Emily. Aware that Emily's father will soon die from tuberculosis, Ellen recognizes the comfort Mike and Saucy Sal provide to Emily.[29] Yet, in general, as Noomé observes, the deep attachment that Emily has toward her feline companions is "met with incomprehension and suspicion by narrow-minded adults."[30] The evening before Emily's father's funeral, as Aunt Laura prepares to take the emotionally exhausted child upstairs to bed, Emily asks permission to have "Mike" come upstairs to her bedroom. The human name initially baffles Aunt Elizabeth. With clarification that "Mike" is, in fact, Emily's big grey cat, Elizabeth is "shocked" and forbids Emily to take him with her because a "cat is a most unwholesome thing in a sleeping apartment." Later, sympathetic Aunt Laura sneaks Mike upstairs, and Emily falls asleep with "something, soft and warm and purry and companionable, snuggling down by her shoulder."[31] Here, Aunt Laura, like Ellen, acknowledges the comfort offered by the animal companion, demonstrating both a sympathetic insight as well as, for Laura, a willingness to circumvent Aunt Elizabeth's dictum. In an 8 March 1921 journal entry, Montgomery describes sleeping with a cat as besting "the

Powers That Ruled" over childhood. The delight, at least in part, is in the subversion of authority. Montgomery humorously acknowledges, "[o]f course I wholly and sternly and remorselessly disapprove of cats sleeping in the bed with anybody! But when *I* was a child—and long after I had ceased to be a child—didn't I have my pet puss with me whenever I could smuggle it past the Powers That Ruled?"[32] The cat in the bedroom subverts adult authority, gesturing toward Emily's future struggle against Aunt Elizabeth's dominance, especially in suppressing Emily's creativity, and linking her sympathetically with Aunt Laura, who appears as a placid and accommodating figure accustomed to bending to Elizabeth's rules but who tacitly acknowledges the arbitrariness of the rules through her willingness to subvert them. Through this small act of cat-smuggling, Emily's desire and Laura's resistance begin to reveal the counter-discursive contours of the narrative of rebellion.

Rebellious daughters and recalcitrant cats challenge existing systems of domestic authority by pursuing their own inclinations. Barnes argues that in the late-nineteenth-century US, "girls themselves became the 'prime products' of the home" and a kind of "consumable" good.[33] Connections can be drawn between the discourses of pet-rearing and child-rearing, as the training of animals and children emphasizes both the perceived need for intervention (to turn the kitten into the right kind of cat, and the girl into the right kind of woman) and the question of the relative plasticity of the subject. Ritvo observes that during the nineteenth century, "[i]t was widely agreed that cats were both deceitful and difficult to train."[34] During the Murray family conclave at Maywood, Emily's maternal relatives similarly despair of her character and conduct. Framing Emily as a willful, headstrong girl, likely to thwart any efforts to mould her, Aunt Eva asserts that she is a "difficult child." Aunt Ruth concurs, remarking "[t]here's work ahead to straighten out *her* manners, if you ask me." Aunt Ruth's language of "straighten[ing]" reinforces the sense that Emily's conduct deviates from expected norms of gender- and class-based behaviours. On the other hand, Uncle Wallace "pompously" proposes that with "wise and careful training many of her faults may be cured,"[35] suggesting the agency and power the adult caregiver may exercise over the pliable material of the child in language that echoes the "reform[ation]" of the stubborn cat into "a more ideal and dependent pet."[36]

The power dynamics of child-training play out in Aunt Elizabeth's efforts to control Emily through a complex set of prescriptions based on family standards, class position, and gender expectations that will reform her idiosyncrasies. Jane H. Hunter

describes “the project of female adolescence” in the Victorian period as “the obliteration of one kind of self and the assumption of another.” Noting that “‘being good’ often took a negative form,” Hunter observes that girls were taught to suppress undesirable characteristics including temper, anger, and willfulness.[37] Aunt Eva’s complaint that Emily is “difficult,” “odd,” and impossible for her to understand emphasizes those aspects of Emily’s unruly, independent nature that must be rooted out to bring her behaviour in line with the social ideal of Victorian girlhood. As Aunt Elizabeth insists that Emily be “grateful” and “obedient”—that she evince “prudence” and “modesty”—Emily’s very nature becomes a battleground in which the integrity of the self is pitted against the will of the adult and the expectations of society.[38] Emily’s capacity for recalcitrance, her resistance to the will of others who seek to mould her, is an integral part of the female *Künstlerroman*. Emily’s pursuit of authentic selfhood and vocation explicitly happens in spite of Aunt Elizabeth’s objection to it.

In her relationship with cats, Emily offers an alternative model of parenting to the one she herself experiences. Framing herself as a surrogate parent to her cats, Emily identifies “proudly” as having “brought them up herself.” Yet when Emily explains to Ellen that a “*living* present is so nice … because it keeps on getting nicer all the time,” she is recognizing the dynamic nature of the animal rather than her own authority over it.[39] The feline companion’s capacity to “[keep] on getting nicer all the time” is disconnected from the rhetoric of the education of children, the training of pets, or the manicuring of nature into elaborate formal gardens; rather than focusing upon improving or altering natural behaviours, Emily’s observation offers a tacit acknowledgement of the individual animal’s dynamic nature revealing itself across time to the sympathetic human caregiver. Yi-Fu Tuan argues that the transformation of an animal into a pet through “successful training” is necessarily a “harsh” story of power that acts “against the victim’s own strong desires and nature.”[40] In contrast to her Murray relatives, Emily presents herself as a parent uninterested in the exercise of power over another being. As an observer-parent, Emily recognizes the uniqueness of her animal companions and attends to their differences with respectful affection. Emily individualizes her cats, identifying them as unique and discrete beings: the acknowledged “favourite,” Mike, endears himself with his sweet ways, while Saucy Sal, a creature of “weird beauty,” is a “redoubtable fighter” who “vanquish[es]” other cats and dogs with “fearless[ness].”[41] The names of both cats take the form of cozy, familiar nicknames emphasizing their emplacement within the fond, affectionate structure of the Starr household;

however, Saucy Sal's name, with its accompanying adjective, evokes feminine boldness, liveliness, and perhaps even irreverence. Their distinct names, personalities, and mannerisms emphasize the quiddity of each feline companion. Emily accepts rather than seeks to mould their nature and, in so doing, models an alternative mode of parenting that replaces the privileging of being good with the freedom of being oneself.

Surplus Girls and Kittens

Emily has raised her two cats, Mike and Saucy Sal, from kittenhood; indeed, we learn that Emily's Sunday school teacher had given her the pair as kittens, implying that they are littermates who were given away together.42 Her devotion to her cats and their integration into the Starr family's inner circle emphasize their cherished position in the household; however, the precious and the surplus are linked, as the presence of two family cats signals their overabundant supply.

In Montgomery's female *Künstlerroman*, superfluous cats and kittens reflect Emily's experience of feeling unwanted and unvalued. When tasked by Aunt Elizabeth with selecting only one of her cats to accompany her to New Moon, Emily elects to take independent Saucy Sal, knowing that the likeable, affectionate, and easy-going Mike will be well cared for by Ellen who "want[s] a cat."43 Her decision contains a recognition that Mike is easier to love because he conforms more closely to a human ideal of animal companion behaviour. Saucy Sal requires the human caregiver to acknowledge the independence and discreteness of the animal's life rather than see the animal's purpose as pleasing the human caregiver. Emily's affinity with the independent, spirited Saucy Sal is clear.44 While Emily must be accommodated with a home among her Murray relatives, their loathness to take on the task of raising her, and their willingness to settle her fate by drawing lots, implies her surplus status. She is simultaneously precious and superfluous; too important to be raised by strangers, Emily is nevertheless unwanted by her mother's siblings and their spouses. Barnes notes that "[t]he kitten's capacity to register for audiences disparate and even contradictory associations of priceless innocence and worthless superfluity" lends the kitten "a unique status within [American] sentimental discourse."45 By finding her place at New Moon and claiming a role within her mother's family, Emily overcomes her kitten-like "superfluity" and affirms the domestic order. But her pursuit of her writerly vocation will require her to prioritize her individual will, realigning her with cat-like independence.

In *The Alpine Path*, Montgomery recalls the vividness of the dramatic, violent stories she wrote during her literary apprenticeship, remarking that "[i]n real life I couldn't have hurt a fly, and the thought that superfluous kittens had to be drowned was torture to me."[46] When Emily's new kitten Mike II is first introduced, he is "frisk[ing] and scamper[ing] about like a small, charming demon of the night" as Cousin Jimmy boils the pigs' potatoes and the children frolic. Mike II is then safely enclosed in the New Moon doghouse for the night before the narrator backtracks to relate the story of the cat's first unwelcomed appearance at New Moon as a gift to Emily from the peddler Jock Kelly. Whether kittens are given by Sunday school teachers or peddlers, they convey superfluity and excess. As Aunt Elizabeth cuttingly remarks, "New Moon is not going to be made a dumping-ground for Old Jock Kelly's superfluous cats."[47] The scene amplifies Elizabeth's autocratic rule as she bids Jimmy to drown the kitten without delay. Cousin Jimmy, cowed by Elizabeth's temper, places the kitten in an old oat-bag before disposing of it in Lofty John's brook. Emily, walking dispiritedly by the brook after dinner, sees the soaked and unhappy kitten who, having escaped its imprisonment, is stranded on a small island. Emily dashes into the brook to rescue the bedraggled creature. With her sense of justice outraged, Emily is "impel[led]," as Kate Sutherland argues, "to obey a higher law than that of Aunt Elizabeth and take a defiant stand."[48] As Emily seethes with "an agony of pity and anger," the "Murray look" involuntarily flashes across Emily's features, precipitating the child's moral victory over Aunt Elizabeth. Emily cares for the kitten tenderly, and her "heart would have broken if anything had happened to Mike II." Mike II's fortuitous escape revises the position of the superfluous or unwanted kitten, transforming him from an emblem of superfluity and abjection (an "unhappy little beast") into a figure of preciousness, value, and importance.[49]

Cats, Creativity, and Language

Throughout the novel, Emily associates cats, especially Mike II, with language. In response to Aunt Laura's offer of a doll as consolation at the prospect of having to leave her cats behind when she moves to New Moon, Emily declares, "I don't like dolls—they can't talk." When her aunt sensibly replies, "Neither can cats," Emily offers the quick rejoinder, "Oh, can't they! Mike and Saucy Sal can." Emily's remark conveys her belief that she and her cats possess some mutual language that exists beyond the limitations of a common spoken tongue. Emily's capacity to listen to unspeaking things—to cats, to nature, to the revelations of the flash—is essential to her development of her craft as a writer, allowing her to locate inspiration in the

world around her and in the activities of her daily life. Like Saucy Sal and the first Mike, Mike II inspires Emily's creativity in language and expression. In a letter to her father, she writes of Mike II that he is "a smee cat. Smee is not in the dictionary. It is a word I invented myself. … It means sleek and glossy and soft and fluffy all in one and something else besides that I cant express." Emily's neologism gestures to her generative capacity—her ability to build new narrative worlds and create language through the inspiration of her companion animal.[50] Emily's growing body of poetry addresses nature, place, and animals, but cats hold a particularly prominent place in her early work. The reader glimpses the titles of some of her poems in the schoolroom scene of Emily's humiliation by Miss Brownell. With titles like "Lines to my Favourite Cat" and "Epitaff on a Drowned Kitten," her poems clearly extend the narrative work of the cat biography into additional genres.[51]

Montgomery's narrative of her own growth and development as a writer is similarly entangled with stories of kittens. In *The Alpine Path*, Montgomery identifies a pair of important events from the year she was nine: her "first realization of the mental pain of sorrow" upon the death of her kitten Pussy-willow from accidental poisoning and the thrill of "discover[ing] that [she] could write poetry."[52] Mike II dies under similar circumstances to Montgomery's childhood kitten, and Emily's grief is similarly keen. In the aftermath of Mike II's death by poison, Aunt Laura offers Emily another kitten. In a letter to her dead father, Emily asserts Mike's irreplaceability, insisting "I don't want another kitten. If I had *millions* of kittens they wouldn't make up for Mike." Instead of replacing Mike II, Emily records the ache of his absence, writing to her father that she is "so lonesome for Mike tonight. Last night he was here playing with me, so cunning and pretty and *smee*, and now he is cold and dead in Lofty John's bush." This is the last appearance of the word "smee" in the novel; while there will be other cats to love, it is as if the word is born and dies with Mike II. His vital energy is stilled and buried; scars form on old words, and new language will be born. While Cousin Jimmy, in warm sympathy with Emily's bereavement, makes the case to Aunt Laura for the existence of animal souls, he refers to Emily's dead kitten as an "innocent little dum creature."[53] Emily, subverting the image of the dumb beast, perceives her cat companions as existing in a rich communicative exchange that is imaginatively presented as a kind of underground language.

Just as cats inspire Emily's creation of language and her writing, the novel itself is inflected by language inspired by the feline. References to "purring" appear five times in the novel: twice in relation to real or imagined cats and three times in

relation to nature. When Aunt Laura brings the first Mike upstairs to Emily's bedroom in the house in the hollow at the beginning of the novel, he is described as "soft," "warm," "companionable," and "purry." Later, when Emily spies the unfinished house that she comes to call the Disappointed House, she reflects, "it was meant to be such a pretty little house—a house you could love—a house where there would be nice chairs and cozy fires and bookcases and lovely, fat, purry cats and unexpected corners." The presence of "fat, purry cats" contributes to the fantasy of domestic contentment—the disappointed house fulfilled, made content and homelike through the addition of these cozy details. The other three references to purring use the distinct sound of the cat to convey aspects of nature. The Wind Woman is described as "purring and peeping around the maple clumps," and in another scene, the "Wind Woman swooped or purred in the tossing boughs above them" while Cousin Jimmy boils the pigs' potatoes. The final reference to purring nature is the Blair Water, the large pond, which "purred and lapped" as the wind blows.54 The Wind Woman is associated with Emily's own nature—an elemental and feminine force with mobility, power, and freedom. The environment of wind and water is rendered cat-like through metaphoric language. While the image of the purring house cat conjures scenes of domestic felicity, Montgomery's mapping of feline metaphors onto the landscape feminizes and claims the world of nature for the cat and for the woman writer.

Disorderly Cats and Women

Montgomery presents a feline, feminine landscape filled with purring waters and wind women, but she also brings feline language into the domestic sphere through the idiolect of Emily's family members. At the time of the Murray family conclave, Cousin Jimmy addresses Emily as "pussy," "puss," and "small pussy," leading her to reflect that she "thought nobody would ever call her nice pet names again."55 Jimmy's language is affectionate and reminds Emily of all the sweet endearments her father had for her. Yet "puss" operates on multiple registers throughout the novel, reminding us of the variable reputation of the feline. The *Oxford English Dictionary* definitions include a "conventional proper or pet name for a cat, frequently … used as a call to attract its attention" but also a "girl or woman" who "exhibit[s] characteristics associated with a cat, as spitefulness, slyness, attractiveness, playfulness, etc." and notes the "now rare" use as a "pet name or term of endearment."56 Great-Aunt Nancy uses similar language—"puss" and "Miss Puss"—but her peremptory tone, instructing Emily to show her ankles or to stay put

until dismissed, implies a more hierarchical and commanding connotation, an assertion of her belief in her power over Emily. Great-Aunt Nancy also describes Beatrice, the disgraced wife of Dr. Burnley, as a “sly puss,” gesturing toward the negative associations of cats with cunning and deceit.[57] If “smee” offers a neologism so perfectly designed as to convey the multiple pleasures, sensory and aesthetic, of looking at a cat, the word “puss” signals the instability of the rhetorical register, indicating sweetness and affection in Cousin Jimmy’s mouth and moral delinquency in Great-Aunt Nancy’s utterance.

Emily of New Moon is filled with disorderly, cat-like women, including in some measure Emily’s own mother, Juliet, who broke with the wishes of her family when she eloped with Douglas Starr. More dramatic, though, is the figure of Beatrice Burnley, Ilse’s mother, who was alleged to have left her sleeping baby and her husband and absconded with a handsome cousin upon a ship that later sank, taking her, and her reputation, to the bottom of the sea. In contrast to the stereotype of the loyal dog, Amato notes that cats in the Victorian period “were accused of feminine disloyalty.” A convention in the nineteenth-century representation of “feline character” was the notion that cats resembled “women who were eager to escape domesticity and vulnerable to the seductions of outside forces.”[58] Indeed, the great moral outrage of the story of Beatrice’s abandonment of her home is the infant left behind. Emily’s fevered vision of Beatrice’s death in the open Lee well—where she has lain a dozen years falsely accused of perfidy, disloyalty, and abandonment by her husband, neighbours, and community—restores her as a “[s]acred” and “beloved” wife and mother, creating a paragon of virtue in place of the woman of infamy.[59] Beatrice embodies the divided reputation of the feline in the nineteenth century, a creature of desire and recklessness that can be transformed into innocence.[60]

While Emily rescues the reputation of one disorderly figure, Montgomery refuses to foreclose on the freedom of the cat Saucy Sal, in the process offering an alternative to the narrative of feminine (and feline) rehabilitation. Saucy Sal can be considered in relation to the novel’s disorderly women as she demonstrates an unusual degree of mobility and freedom. Upon her arrival at New Moon, she vanquishes the existing barn cats, “[drinking] deep the delight of battle with her peers,” in language that anticipates Emily’s psychological and social battles in the schoolroom. She is increasingly aligned with the barn cats at and around New Moon Farm, complicating the division between a pet (an indoor creature with a name and some standing

within the house) and the nameless out-of-door cats. Saucy Sal blossoms when left to pursue her own solitary path, even resolving Emily's ongoing concern with her lack of kittens by having a litter with Ilse's Tom while Emily is at Wyther Grange. Saucy Sal's "weird beauty" is an echo of Emily's own uncanniness and her unconventional beauty, while both the spirited, saucy cat and the determined young writer seek the freedom and independence to follow their own paths.[61]

Loyal Dogs and Dangerous Men

In contrast to the ambivalent reputation of the Victorian cat, dogs were viewed as ideal pets, inclined by their nature to contented lives of loyalty and subordination to their human owners. Ritvo observes the "special" nature of the human-dog relationship that "epitomized the appropriate relationship between masters and subordinates."[62] In *Emily of New Moon,* dogs prove companionable allies, as Dean Priest's dog, Tweed, stands by as faithful sentinel during Emily's desperate half hour on the edge of the cliff, appearing "very human and trusty" as he "watch[es] her with great kindly eyes,"[63] and Teddy Kent's puppy, Leo, often joins the children in their play. Noomé observes that unlike the individualized cats in Montgomery's fictions, the dogs "tend to be … stereotyped, as loving and faithful."[64] Dean's dog emblematizes the ideal loyalty and reliability of the well-trained dog. When Dean comes across Emily clinging to a precipitous cliffside, he declares, "I'll save you" and leaves Tweed behind "to keep [her] company" while he goes for a rope. The dog arrives at the summons of his master's whistle, and the implication is that the dog will obey Dean's command to "[s]it right here" and not "stir a paw" or "wag a tail" until Dean returns. Tweed sits "obediently" and consoles Emily with his steadfast presence, leading Emily to conclude "that a dog is better than a cat when you're in trouble."[65]

Amato notes that Victorian social constructions of cats and dogs reinforced "prescriptive ideas about feminine and masculine behaviour in middle-class society" [66]; however, Montgomery plays within, and against, such conventions. While her characterization of dogs in *Emily of New Moon* replicates the stereotypes of loyalty and reliability, the position of the dog-owner is more complicated. Throughout the novel, dogs are associated with male characters, in particular with Dean, Teddy, and Dr. Burnley. While the animals, Tweed and Leo, are benign, the male characters pose real or implied threats to feminine creativity, freedom, and independence.[67] Emily's initiation into the complexities of adult romantic relations coincides with her

visit to Wyther Grange, a section of the text presided over by dogs. The journey begins with an uncomfortably jesting conversation with Jock Kelly, who drives her to Priest's Pond. Old Kelly teases Emily about her future wedding, her beau, her "come-hither eyes," and finally offers her recourse to a love charm if ever in need. His parting gift to her is a "dainty little hairbrush"[68] with an inset mirror on the reverse, an object that gestures toward feminine vanity and self-grooming, pejoratively imagined in the nineteenth-century symbolic vernacular as a cat-like preoccupation.[69] Wyther Grange is guarded by its ornamental stone dogs that preside at the gate posts.[70] Once inside the home, in the company of her Great-Aunt Nancy and the "witch"-like Caroline Priest (so called by Uncle Oliver, Ilse Burnley, and Jock Kelly), Emily is initiated into amatory knowledge through the gossiping of the elderly women and through Dean's predatory affection.[71] Romantic love represents a threat to the integrity of the self, especially in the context of the female *Künstlerroman*, by actively or implicitly threatening female creation and limiting feminine freedom. Dean's dog may be emblematic of loyalty and trustworthiness, but Dean himself is a troubling character. While the narrator frames Dean as a "companion who could fully sympathize" with Emily's interests and passions, he is plotting a long game of romantic conquest that will continue into the later books in the trilogy, *Emily Climbs* and *Emily's Quest*. Dean actively positions himself against cats, declaring that cats are "too exacting—they ask too much. Dogs want only love but cats demand worship."[72] Dean's antipathy to cats anticipates his eventual antagonism to Emily's vocation as a writer, which will become clear in *Emily's Quest* when he lies about the quality of her book manuscript, leading her to burn it. Montgomery thus subverts the conventional association of dogs and loyalty by linking Tweed to the man who represents the greatest threat to Emily's vocation.

Extending this pattern, Dr. Burnley, a man disappointed in love and who by reputation and action "*hates* women," gives a puppy to Teddy, linking the baleful, romantically disappointed doctor to Emily's adored first love.[73] While Teddy, "a very nice boy," is positioned as a suitable romantic prospect for Emily, Montgomery conveys that romance threatens the fledgling writer's autonomy and freedom to pursue her craft. Just as Dean summons Tweed by whistling, Teddy uses his special whistle, which Emily declares admiringly is "just like a bird," to call to Emily, a summons that "could have whistled her clear across the world."[74] Boys, men, and dogs are connected to the novel's exploration of marriage, amatory feeling, and erotic desire and framed in this first book of the trilogy as the latent threats to Emily's creative ambitions. In Montgomery's female *Künstlerroman*, Emily

challenges the expectation of her eventual conscription into the domestic sphere, instead working resolutely to carve out the privacy and solitude necessary to pursue her vocation as a writer. Independent, self-reliant cats offer an example for the developing writer's pursuit of the difficult and solitary path toward artistic maturity.

Conclusion: "Kipling's Cat"

Throughout *Emily of New Moon*, Emily's exploration of freedom, creativity, aloneness, and wildness links her to the lives of cats. Her respect for cats and kittens makes a case for their importance and acknowledges their quiddity, reinforcing in the process her own sense of difference, independence, and value. As she seeks acceptance among family and friends and the freedom to develop as a writer—a room of her own, writing materials, privacy, and time—Emily is divided between the competing loyalties of the domestic milieu and the solitary imperative of her vocation. In Montgomery's long journal entry memorializing her cousin Frede after her death in 1919, Montgomery notes that "Frede, like myself, had a somewhat lonely and misunderstood childhood. She was 'different' from the rest of her family. She was, as she expressed it, 'the cat who walked by herself.'"[75] The language of the lone cat is explicitly developed in *Emily Climbs*. Emily describes herself as "Kipling's cat," gesturing to "The Cat That Walked by Himself," a story from Kipling's *Just So Stories for Little Children* (1902), that tells of the domestication of the dog, the horse, and the cow. The cat, determined to avail itself of some of the comforts of the home without sacrificing its essential freedom, outwits the human woman who seeks to domesticate the animals; however, as the cat's bargain is not made with man or dog, the cat is bound forever to have things thrown at it by men and be pursued by dogs in its dual existence as a free being of the "Wet Wild Woods" and a creature who occasionally may enter a human domicile. The cat maintains its freedom and engages with domesticity on its own terms. Emily, paraphrasing Kipling, observes to Dean, "I walk by my wild lone and wave my wild tail where so it pleases me. That's why the Murrays look askance at me. They think I should only run with the pack." In *Emily of New Moon*, the impulses of such lone cats are understood and accepted. Saucy Sal is subjected to no undue influence or control; she moves with freedom from house to barn, frolics with Ilse's "Tom," and finally has a litter of kittens of her own (including one survivor that escapes Aunt Elizabeth's remorseless cull). Emily is often positioned among her friends and her family, yet she is fundamentally the "cat who walk[s] by herself," seeking the freedom to "wave [her] wild tail and walk by [her] wild lone."[76] Her journey across the three novels that

form the *Künstlerroman* necessitates some measure of solitariness. The cat becomes an apt corollary to the female writer who, in pursuing her vocation, accepts the urgent necessity of a life set apart.

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Banner Image: "The Cat That Walked by Himself," illustration by Rudyard Kipling. *Just So Stories* (The Victorian Web, image scanned by George P. Landow). https://victorianweb.org/art/illustration/kipling/23.html

- 1 Emily Byrd Starr's connection with cats is central to the novel, but her homophonous middle name also evokes her connection with birds, both wild and caged. The sight of a "greybird lighting on her window-sill in a storm" can

prompt the appearance of “the flash”; escaping her punishment in the New Moon spare room, she likens herself to “a little bird that had just got out of a cage”; and after her misadventure on the bay shore, with the “wonderful thrill” of life coursing through her, she writes in a letter to her dead father that she feels “as if a little bird was singing in my heart” (Montgomery, *ENM* 8, 136, 325).

- 2 Joy Alexander, writing of *Anne of Green Gables*, comments on the absence of livestock, local wildlife, and pets in Montgomery’s first novel, remarking “[i]t is strange that, although Green Gables is a working farm, there are only fleeting references to its cows and hens” (Alexander, “Anne with Two ‘G’s” 49, 51). Similarly, Idette Noomé observes the marginal positioning of farm animals, who lurk around the edges of Montgomery’s writing but rarely take centre stage (Noomé, “The Nature of the Beast” 199). Emily, returning home from her summer visit to Wyther Grange, is greeted by Perry’s “gossip of kittens and calves and little pigs and the new foal,” suggesting their shared interest in the animals of New Moon Farm. Nevertheless, the lives and deaths of the Murrays’ pigs occur firmly off-stage. While Emily is tasked with taking the cows to pasture, they remain massed and anonymous, rather than singularized and named. The lone narratively significant farm animal in *Emily of New Moon* is “Mr. James Lee’s English bull,” whose name indicates his commodity status rather than his individuality (Montgomery, *ENM* 337, 189, 179).
- 3 Barnes, “Drowning (in) Kittens” 307.
- 4 Montgomery, *CJ* 4 (4 Jan. 1919): n153. Editor Jen Rubio identifies the phrase cats who “walk by themselves” as one of Montgomery’s favourite sayings, taken from Rudyard Kipling’s *Just So Stories for Little Children*. Other cats prowling about the novel include Father Cassidy’s impressive cat, the B’y; Teddy’s cats, Smoke and Buttercup; Ilse’s barn cat, the father of Saucy Sal’s eventual litter; and unnamed barn cats at New Moon Farm.
- 5 Rubio, “Subverting the Trite” 8.
- 6 Amato, *Beastly Possessions* 12, 6.
- 7 Montgomery, *ENM* 302.
- 8 Amato 15.
- 9 Leach, “Anthropological Aspects of Language” 45.
- 10 Fudge, *Pets* 17, 18.
- 11 Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* 110, 112, 113, 115. Grier notes some pets “do eventually get eaten, which simply reflects the contingent status of the designation” (*Pets in America* 8). We might think here of Adam, Faith’s pet

rooster in *Rainbow Valley*, who is killed by Aunt Martha and served for dinner to a visiting minister, or of Big Sam's longing for a cat in *A Tangled Web*, as he regretfully acknowledges that the two ducks he keeps are "company—but knowing you have to eat 'em up some day spoils things" (Montgomery, *TW* 180).

- 12 Grier 8.
- 13 Ritvo, *The Animal Estate* 21–22.
- 14 Broderip, *Zoological Recreations* 191. An exception to this pattern is Father Cassidy, the owner of a remarkable cat called the B'y. In answer to Emily's observation, "I see you have a cat," Father Cassidy epigrammatically declares, "Wrong. … A cat has me" (Montgomery, *ENM* 233).
- 15 Amato 60.
- 16 Ritvo 116–17.
- 17 Weir, *Our Cats and All About Them* Preface.
- 18 Noomé 198.
- 19 Amato 60.
- 20 Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass* 145.
- 21 Weir Preface.
- 22 Montgomery, *ENM* 8. Similarly, in *The Alpine Path: The Story of My Career*, which first appeared as a sequence of six autobiographical essays in *Everywoman's World* between June and November 1917, Montgomery recalls her own prolific and varied juvenilia included "biographies of my many cats" (Montgomery, *AP* 274).
- 23 Krebber and Roscher, "Introduction: Animal Biographies, Animals and Individuality" 2.
- 24 Both Seton and Roberts were embroiled in the "Nature Fakers Controversy." In "Real and Sham Natural History," a 1903 essay published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, the naturalist John Burroughs critiques authors William J. Long, William Davenport Hulbert, Seton, and Roberts for misrepresenting wild animals in their ostensibly true stories. Quipping that Seton's *Wild Animals I Have Known* might better be called "Wild Animals I *Alone* Have Known," Burroughs observes, "Mr. Thompson Seton says in capital letters that his stories are true, and it is this emphatic assertion that makes the judicious grieve. True as romance, true in their artistic efforts, true in their power to entertain the young reader, they certainly are; but true as natural history they as certainly are not."
- 25 Krebber and Roscher 2.

- 26 Montgomery, *CJ* 4 (4 Jan. 1919): 83, 85. The urge to pet other cats is also recorded in the journals. For example, she writes of a cat called Tiger—at twenty-six pounds appearing like "the King of Catland"—who is an "amazing creature. … He sits on [the McCombs'] veranda in the evenings and my hands burn to stroke him. But he is not over friendly to strangers" (Montgomery, *CJ* 4 [3 Aug. 1919]: 173).
- 27 Montgomery, *CJ* 4 (4 Jan. 1919): 83–84 (emphasis in original). Cousin Jimmy echoes Montgomery, suggesting that Emily's dead kitten, Mike II, "has a share in God. … Emily loved him and all love is part of God" (Montgomery, *ENM* 252). In her journals, Montgomery imagines a heaven filled with kittens, speculating that "long and intimate association with a loving human companion may, and sometimes does, develop a soul in an animal" (Montgomery, *CJ* 4 [4 Jan. 1919]: 84).
- 28 Noomé 199.
- 29 While Emily emphasizes Ellen's dullness, the housekeeper's action highlights her power of observation and compassion as she recognizes that the child will benefit from her tender interaction with her pets. Ellen must also like cats, as Emily leaves Mike to her care and trusts that Ellen "would be good to him" (Montgomery, *ENM* 55).
- 30 Noomé 203.
- 31 Montgomery, *ENM* 38.
- 32 Montgomery, *CJ* 4 (8 Mar. 1921): 310 (emphasis in original).
- 33 Barnes 313, 314.
- 34 Ritvo 22.
- 35 Montgomery, *ENM* 44, 45 (emphasis in original), 47.
- 36 Amato 60.
- 37 Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls* 101, 99.
- 38 Montgomery, *ENM* 44, 70, 71.
- 39 Montgomery, *ENM* 4 (emphasis in original).
- 40 Tuan, *Dominance and Affection* 108, 107.
- 41 Montgomery, *ENM* 4.
- 42 Montgomery, *ENM* 4.
- 43 Montgomery, *ENM* 55.
- 44 While Emily's pointed ears are mentioned several times as a sign that she is "kin to tribes of elfland" (in particular by the sympathetic Father Cassidy who declares in a "thrilling" stage whisper, "I *knew* she came straight from fairyland the minute I saw her"), another possible connection is to the pointed ears of her

feline companions (Montgomery, *ENM* 5, 233 [emphasis in original]).

- 45 Barnes 308.
- 46 Montgomery, *AP* 279. Barnes observes that "'caring' for kittens involved not only life-giving sustenance and protection, but humane elimination" (309). Drowning was routine, a matter-of-fact way to deal with a surplus population in the absence of other forms of population control. As a point of contrast, Teddy's controlling mother, Mrs. Kent, is reputed to have once drowned a kitten out of jealousy of her son's affection for it. The drowning of a kitten also figures as a plot point in *Rilla of Ingleside* when little Bruce Meredith drowns his beloved kitten, Stripey, as a ritual sacrifice to help bring Jem home from the Great War.
- 47 Montgomery, *ENM* 173, 176.
- 48 Sutherland, "The Education of Emily" 137.
- 49 Montgomery, *ENM* 178, 175, 177.
- 50 Montgomery, *ENM* 54, 217 (misspelling in the original). Mike II also inspires Perry's lone poetic creation (done to prove anyone can write poetry): "*Mike has made a long row / Of tracks across the snow*" (Montgomery, *ENM* 188).
- 51 Montgomery, *ENM* 199.
- 52 Montgomery, *AP* 268, 274.
- 53 Montgomery, *ENM* 251, 252 (emphasis in original).
- 54 Montgomery, *ENM* 38, 78–79, 78, 173, 228.
- 55 Montgomery, *ENM* 32, 36, 41.
- 56 "Puss, n.1."
- 57 Montgomery, *ENM* 292, 298, 311.
- 58 Amato 61.
- 59 Montgomery, *ENM* 394.
- 60 Amato notes the cat was "an exemplar for womanly conduct since it could be held up as a model of feminine virtue" or "condemned as an incarnation of female vice, much like the archetypal Victorian prostitute" (60).
- 61 Montgomery, *ENM* 75, 4.
- 62 Ritvo 20.
- 63 Montgomery, *ENM* 320.
- 64 Noomé 204.
- 65 Montgomery, *ENM* 319–20.
- 66 Amato 57–58.
- 67 The prospect of marriage, lurking in the background of the novel of development, represents a threat to the female artist's creative ambitions as it will place demands upon the artist's time, attention, and devotion to her craft.

As Lindsey McMaster observes, the “romantic interest” of such men “may be … dangerous to [Emily’s] artistry” (“The Murray Look” 51).

- 68 Montgomery, *ENM* 283–84.
- 69 Amato 60. Amato cites an essay from the periodical *Our Cats* (27 Dec. 1899), which declares that a “cat is very like a woman; her toilet is the most important business of the day” and notes “[s]imilar sentiments are expressed in ‘Our Cats: A Domestic History,’” published in the *Illustrated London News*, 18 Oct. 1884 (Amato 60, 236).
- 70 The “chessy-cat” doorknocker on the door to Great-Aunt Nancy’s bedroom is one feline emblem at Wyther Grange (Montgomery, *ENM* 289). It is a Murray family heirloom and is bequeathed to Emily, who receives it in *Emily’s Quest* after the death of Great-Aunt Nancy.
- 71 Montgomery, *ENM* 45, 282, 285.
- 72 Montgomery, *ENM* 330, 333. In *Emily’s Quest*, Dean will “jestingly” accuse Emily of “lov[ing] that old cat [Daffy] more than you do me” (Montgomery, *EQ* 77).
- 73 Montgomery, *ENM* 310 (emphasis in original). As an added irony, Teddy names the dog Leo, an echo of the name of Leo Mitchell, the cousin with whom Beatrice was reputed to have run away. Leo’s vessel was called *The Lady of Winds*, a name that evokes Emily’s Wind Woman (Montgomery, *ENM* 312).
- 74 Montgomery, *ENM* 151, 152, 173.
- 75 Montgomery, *CJ* 4 (7 Feb. 1919): 116.
- 76 Montgomery, *EC* 89–90, 242.

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