Creative Vision, Grief, and Memory in L.M. Montgomery’s The Blythes Are Quoted and Virginia Woolf’s To the Lighthouse

DOI
http://doi.org/10.32393/jlmms/2024.0032
Published on
Mon, 12/02/2024 - 10:04

L.M. Montgomery’s posthumously published book *The Blythes Are Quoted* and Virginia Woolf’s novel *To the Lighthouse* are both divided into two parts that are interrupted by the First World War. The visions of hope and possibility in the first section of each book are replaced in the second halves by re-visions of nostalgia, grief, and growth. While Woolf and Montgomery are not often discussed together, a comparison of these novels highlights how, for both authors, aesthetic creations such as painting, writing, and storytelling become a means for their characters to process grief and remember lost loved ones.

You and I will follow from door to door,
Many of us will come back no more …
— L.M. Montgomery, “The Piper,” *The Blythes Are Quoted*[1]

In her 1992 article “Subverting the Trite: L.M. Montgomery’s ‘Room of Her Own,’” Mary Rubio outlines striking biographical parallels between writers L.M. Montgomery and Virginia Woolf. In their personal lives, both women experienced childhood traumas, depressive episodes, and late marriages to exacting men. As professionals, they were incredibly prolific writers who left decades worth of letters and journals. Both women were sensitive, sharply intelligent, and chafed at the limited educational opportunities afforded to women. They guarded their writing time

aggressively—a feat Montgomery managed even with two sons—and their productivity was interrupted only by dire life circumstances. No record suggests that they read each other's works, but they were influenced by similar nineteenth-century writers, particularly the Brontë sisters. Perhaps most importantly, Rubio asserts that although the two women had divergent rhetorical styles, they were both invested in a female literary tradition. As Rubio states, "What both Montgomery and Woolf recognized was that it is necessary for women writers to have equal opportunity to create fictional worlds from women's perspectives—to create, so to speak, rooms of their own. The medium (and style) through which Montgomery and Woolf spoke may have been radically different, but their message was much the same."[2]

Rubio uses the comparison to Woolf, a modernist champion of female authorship, to establish Montgomery as a writer with a different style but a comparable stature, someone who "was able to reinforce all the prevailing ideologies which her conventional readers expected while at the same time embedding a counter-text of rebellion for those who were clever enough to read between the lines."[3] While Rubio sees Montgomery and Woolf's "medium (and style)" as "radically different," the publication of *The Blythes Are Quoted* in 2009 (and republication in 2018) has complicated this contrast. Montgomery's *The Blythes Are Quoted* and Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* are strikingly similar in their construction, made up of multiple character perspectives loosely connected by a central family, either the Blythes or the Ramsays. The first part of *To the Lighthouse*, set at the Ramsay family's vacation home on the Isle of Skye, is dominated by two activities: Mr. Ramsay's planned trip to the lighthouse with his children and artist Lily Briscoe's painting of Mrs. Ramsay and her son James. Neither of these activities is completed until the end of the novel, when Lily's painting is finished just as the boat lands at the lighthouse a decade later.[4] *The Blythes Are Quoted*, while compiled of multiple narratives and loosely associated characters, is structurally similar. Part One and Part Two are divided by "The Great War" with both organizational and stylistic continuity, even as themes and expectations are disrupted. Forty-one poems by Anne Blythe and her son Walter are interspersed across eleven vignettes about the Blythe family. Nestled in between are sixteen short stories about characters in the surrounding Prince Edward Island communities, and the Blythes play only secondary roles. More significantly, as Elizabeth Epperly notes in the 2018 afterword to *The Blythes*, the "frame story takes Anne Shirley Blythe and her family a full two decades beyond anything else Montgomery published about them."[5] Both texts explore the ways in

which the Blythe and the Ramsay families are altered by the passing years and respond to the losses of the Great War.

Besides their structural similarities, *The Blythes Are Quoted* and *To the Lighthouse* thematically interrogate the nature of memory, grief, and creative vision through characters "absorbed in the wresting of order and sequence out of chaos."[6] Woolf's character Lily, a counterpart to Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse,* is the author's personal examination of the modern female writer: Woolf biographer Julia Briggs describes Lily as "a portrait of the artist as woman, anticipating the portrait of the woman writer who would demand *A Room of One's Own*, two years later."[7] In *The Blythes,* Anne's poetry readings allow Montgomery to spotlight the woman-as-writer in a domestic setting. While Anne is structurally comparable to the maternal Mrs. Ramsay, Montgomery blurs the roles of mother and artist, especially in the second half of the book, when poetry becomes a tool for processing grief. Across both works, the Blythes and the Ramsays (and their matriarchs in particular) explore ways of perceiving and ordering their surroundings that evolve into experiences of re-vision and memory. Woolf and Montgomery are commonly associated with their respective nations and specific literary movements,[8] but a comparison of these novels brings their work into a literary dialogue that illuminates the particular complexities with which both writers explored their craft as women writers.

Structural Parallels: *The Blythes Are Quoted* and *To the Lighthouse*

Despite their different literary and narrative styles, Woolf and Montgomery use similar techniques and devices, exploring text and art as memory and re-visioning their uniquely feminine narratives through shifting perspectives and the passage of time. The textual building blocks—structural and aesthetic—are a myriad of perspectives and stories through which gender, class, and age are all represented. In *To the Lighthouse,* intertextuality and imagery link characters to significant moments and memories; in *The Blythes Are Quoted,* parallel poems, short story structures, and themes interact indirectly.

Both Woolf's and Montgomery's novels are divided into two parts interrupted by the First World War, which brings both personal loss and cultural change. *To the Lighthouse*, the fifth of Woolf's nine novels, was published in 1927, during the height of Europe's modernist movement and at a productive time in Woolf's career. The novel is constructed in an "H" form—two sections of one day each ("The Window" and "The Lighthouse") joined by "a corridor," the decade in between, entitled "Time

Passes."[9] Woolf writes in her diary about how she envisions her book as a fresh way to reimagine narrative progression and structural prose, particularly her plans to invoke "the flight of time and the consequent break of unity in my design. That passage (I conceive the book in 3 parts. 1. at the drawing room window; 2. seven years passed; 3. the voyage) interests me very much."[10] The first and third sections of the novel drift and jump between various character perspectives but ultimately privilege the perspective of the two main female characters: Mrs. Ramsay and Lily. As Briggs explains, the structural experimentation of *To the Lighthouse* provides a canvas for examining past losses and future uncertainties, particularly for women, whose "personal memories are controlled within an aesthetic form."[11] *To the Lighthouse* is one of Woolf's most intimate books, drawing on the complicated family dynamics of her childhood and on her own identity as an artist.

The Blythes Are Quoted is more difficult to date. Probably composed sometime between 1939 and Montgomery's death in April 1942, it was not published in its complete form until 2009. As editor Benjamin Lefebvre notes in his 2018 introduction, the manuscript was submitted to Montgomery's publisher in the days before her death, but it was left unpublished in her intended form for decades.[12] An abridged version was released in 1974 with the title *The Road to Yesterday*, but the publishers omitted all of the vignettes and poems with the Blythe family, edited several of the short stories, and eliminated the extended first story, "Some Fools and a Saint."[13] While many of the short stories and poems had been published previously, Lefebvre's research for *The Blythes Are Quoted* reveals Montgomery's careful edits and revisions as well as a deliberate organization of the texts. Whatever their previous context, Montgomery constructed the stories, vignettes, and poems to deliberately inform and dialogue with each other. Lefebvre notes that the recurring themes—"adultery, illegitimacy, despair, misogyny, murder, conflict, revenge, bitterness, hatred, aging, and death"—had existed as subtle subtopics in Montgomery's earlier works but take centre stage in this final book. In addition, Lefebvre outlines how the thematic debates that haunt Montgomery's work and career are complexly interrogated in this collection: "romance and realism, individual and community, hope and hopelessness, harmony and conflict, order and chaos, memory and forgetting."[14] In some ways, this book is the culmination of her life's work.

The architecture of each book is both spatial and temporal. While the points of view and narrative voices change, the provincial settings do not. Both books are set on

outlying islands from their respective nations—the rural communities of Prince Edward Island, Canada, and the Isle of Skye, Scotland: the bigger world (references to Europe and “the mainland” and cities) is background noise. Movement occurs instead through shifting character perspectives and uneven chronological progression. For example, in “Here Comes the Bride,” Montgomery approaches a traditional wedding largely through wedding guests’ inner monologues. The narrative perspectives swirl inward, beginning with an impartial outside observer, a “bored reporter,” then onward to friends, the immediate family, and finally the groom and bride.15 Each new focalization provides additional information about the couple’s backstory, coloured by personal bias, admiration, jealousy, and hearsay. The reader receives a final, extended story from Mary Hamilton, “the family’s cook and the *deus ex machina* who brought about the marriage” (as Caroline Jones describes her), chatting with the Blythe housekeeper, Susan, in the back of the room.16 This structure, while retaining Montgomery’s signature use of gossip and oral style, is innovative: the narrative architecture takes the reader through a series of anecdotal rooms, partially obscured from the interior. Just as the reader arrives in the centre (the bride and groom), they are dropped into the chambers below where the architect (Mary Hamilton) resides.

In this story and others from *The Blythes*, setting defines and is defined by the point of view of both reader and characters. For example, in “The Cheated Child,” Patrick Brewster, a wealthy but lonely, love-starved boy, envisions a perfectly humble home that contrasts sharply with what his estranged uncle assumes he would want. Convinced that his orphaned nephew would never choose to live on a simple farm, Barney Andrews scoffs when his friend urges him to claim guardianship of the boy: “‘Do you suppose a boy brought up at Oaklands would choose *this*?’ Barney waved his hand at the sagging gate and at the old clapboard house that needed paint so badly … But to Pat he seemed to be waving at the boatload of petunias and Jiggs [the dog] and the bedroom with the garden door, at the long, level meadows beyond.”17 Barney’s gesture to the landscape reveals two very different perspectives of the same scene: where Barney sees privation and simplicity, Pat sees the promise of family and freedom.

While in “The Cheated Child,” a single place is redefined through different eyes, in *To the Lighthouse*, one place is re-visioned across time. Six-year-old James spends the entire day of Part I, “The Window,” fixated on a trip to the lighthouse. His desire to travel to the lighthouse with his father is contrasted with the day actually spent at

home with his mother. Returning a decade later, after the war that has claimed a sister, a brother, and his mother, James-the-teenager is reluctant to go on the trip with his father. James remembers that as a child, he saw the lighthouse as "a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye, that opened suddenly, and softly in the evening. Now ... the tower, stark and straight ... was barred with black and white; he could see windows in it; he could even see washing spread on the rocks to dry." Unlike in "The Cheated Child," in which the wide-eyed nephew and the jaded uncle see such differing views of the same place, James must reconcile the two different perspectives of the lighthouse in his memory, realizing that "nothing was simply one thing. The other Lighthouse was true too."18 As Briggs points out, in *To the Lighthouse* "Woolf employs a quasi-Shakespearean 'double time scheme,' compacting the passage of ten years into that of a single night, sandwiched between two daytime episodes, so that in one sense, James does go to the lighthouse the next morning, but that morning takes place ten years on."19 In both novels, the chronological passage of time is subservient to the characters' experience of place as perceived in a personal moment.

Just as the passage of time is experienced in relation to a character's individual consciousness, their conversations are likewise disrupted by internal monologues or extended sensations. In both novels, dialogue is secondary to the characters' perceptions. For example, both books open with a response to an implied question or comment that fails to develop into a conversation. These replies are then followed by a page of description and narrative, leaving the character's opening comment hanging, disjointed, in the text. Woolf's novel opens with Mrs. Ramsay addressing her son James: "'Yes, of course, if it's fine tomorrow,' said Mrs. Ramsay. 'But you'll have to be up with the lark,' she added."20 As Joshua Kavaloski states, "this first line in *To the Lighthouse* is merely a reply, and the speech act that launches the story actually occurs outside of the text ... *To the Lighthouse* bears here an opening without a clear entrance."21 Narratively, Mrs. Ramsay opens and closes the first part, responding, after 120 pages, to her husband's prediction that it would "be wet tomorrow" and therefore they would not be able to go to the lighthouse.22 Her voice brackets the section "The Window," a structure that is paralleled in "The Lighthouse," which begins and ends with Lily's perspective. *The Blythes Are Quoted* also opens mid-conversation: "'You are going to board at Long Alec's!' exclaimed Mr. Sheldon in amazement."23 Here, Montgomery establishes rhetorical style rather than character voice, since most of the book's stories open mid-movement or mid-dialogue, setting the scene with a focal character's perspective or reaction. These

openings demonstrate both the parallels in the books as well as each author's signature style. As Rubio puts it, "Woolf writes out of a cultured, literary tradition for a sophisticated audience. Montgomery writes out of the vernacular, oral tradition transplanted from Scotland ... and she writes for an all-encompassing popular audience."[24]

For example, the stories "Retribution" and "The Reconciliation," both in Part One of *The Blythes,* follow remarkably similar formats, with an elderly character setting out to Lowbridge to settle an old score. In the former, Clarissa Wilcox is determined to see David Anderson on his deathbed, having waited forty years to tell him of her hatred. In the latter, Miss Shelley plans to forgive, after thirty years, Lisle Stephens for stealing her beau. In both tales, the journey parallels the characters' flashbacks, gradually revealing the background story. In splendidly ironic twists, Clarissa realizes that, after David dies, she was in love with him all along, and Miss Shelley slaps Lisle for forgetting about the offence, thus renewing her grudge. In both stories, the reader's expectations, following the main character, are suspended in anticipation, then disrupted by the protagonist's own distorted perspective of a relationship. This theme of misunderstood identities or intentions, ranging from children to the elderly, recurs throughout the book.

Just as Mrs. Ramsay's comments destabilize, then reorient, the reader, Montgomery draws the reader into each tale only to intermittently disrupt the narrative expectations. But the suspended fulfillment of a story's arc and pattern of disrupted expectations manifests differently in the two novels. While Montgomery's stories reinforce the strength of narrative (or gossip) to determine subjective truths, Woolf undermines the basic ability of her characters to form a coherent narrative. For example, across the novel as a whole, Woolf fractures referenced texts such as Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade" and the Brothers Grimm fairy tale "The Fisherman and His Wife." Kavaloski reads these fractured narratives as a "pattern of embedded stories" that disrupts, rather than reinforces, narrative unity. For example, Mr. Ramsay's recitation of Tennyson's poem is disordered and fragmented; he interrupts other characters' processes as they try to paint, read, or cogitate. Mrs. Ramsay's storytime with James limps in fragments throughout the first part of the novel, with the traditional "happily ever after" conspicuously absent. The Victorian poem and the fairy tale promise "the existence of an aesthetic unity in the story world," as Kavaloski observes, "but the narrative discourse persistently undermines that unity."[25] Woolf's metatextuality and Montgomery's mimetic stories

disrupt the reader's anticipation of their narrative progression, echoing the novel's larger themes of how memory and vision present fractured experiences that are more associative than continuous.

The most profound narrative disruption, however, is the First World War, which cuts through both texts, paradoxically bisecting and suturing the adjacent sections. The interludes move away from the characters, leaving the readers off-balance as we are pulled out of the story into a spatial interruption of the narrative. In *To the Lighthouse*, the middle section "Time Passes" follows a new central character—the abandoned vacation house—as it succumbs to the natural elements over time. This section reads like poetic prose and is notably more lyrical than the parts that precede and follow it. Indeed, Woolf worried about the sentimentality of the section, reflecting in her journal, "The lyric portions of *To the Lighthouse* are collected in the 10-year lapse and don't interfere with the text so much as usual. I feel as if it fetched its circle pretty completely this time; and I don't feel sure what the stock criticism will be. Sentimental? Victorian?"[26] Despite her misgivings, "Time Passes" is critically acclaimed as one of the most powerful and innovative passages in the novel.

Montgomery does not dedicate an entire narrative section to the war years, but her tone, while more abbreviated, is similarly bittersweet. For example, the first poem in Part Two of *The Blythes*—called "Interlude" and attributed to Walter—is ethereal and ghostly, evoking a shadowy dream of the "kiss of yesterday." The sea's mist carries a "wind of dream" from "many a haunted place." In addition to foreshadowing Walter's own death (the reader hears his words from "yesterday," evoking, like the "kiss," "a lost delight"), his poem thematically shifts the text from a preoccupation with place and belonging to memory and nostalgia.[27] The imagery in "Time Passes" also evokes nature personified as the dominant force navigating distinctions between absence and presence: "Night after night, summer and winter, the torment of storms, the arrow-like stillness of fine weather, held their court without interference."[28] The architectural disruptions in the text reflect the disorienting effects of war: as readers, we must work to follow the story as the characters search for meaning in their postwar years. The lyricism of the transitional section in both books presages the capitulation of human experience to natural elements and the passage of time. Notably, the contrasting visions of optimism/fertility and loss/death in both books are tied to the same characters: the matriarchs of the Blythe and Ramsay families.

Hestia of the Hearth: Mrs. Blythe and Mrs. Ramsay

The characters in each text orbit the parallel figures of Anne Blythe and Mrs. Ramsay, the discerning matriarchs of their families and communities. Like the Greek goddess Hestia, they reign over the home and hearth, serving as the reference points and foundations of each family and, more broadly, each community. They are each linked to their respective homesteads and provide structure for the narratives even when they are not personally present. Indeed, Mrs. Ramsay is an active figure only in the first part of the book: she dies during the war in the second part, and in the third part, the family returns to the lighthouse in the shadow of her death. But her memory haunts the house and is ultimately realized as a central shape in Lily's completed painting. Anne Blythe likewise is both prominent and peripheral: she is decentralized in the collected stories, yet she is regularly referenced by other characters, and her domestic poetry readings are tied to the themes of the rest of the tales. Both women are the subjects of speculation and gossip and largely (though not universally) admired by their communities. Mothers of multiple children—Anne Blythe has six children, and Mrs. Ramsay has eight—they exercise a gravitational influence on those close to them, encouraging or rebuking their children, supporting their spouses, and engaging (somewhat harmlessly) in matchmaking schemes for acquaintances. Thematically, Montgomery and Woolf use these characters to review the boundaries of traditional feminine roles, paying homage to their influence even as they explore alternative métiers for women through Lily's artistic identity and Anne's writing.

Mrs. Ramsay and the summer house are central to the aesthetic of *To the Lighthouse*, conceptually linked by the family and guests who gather there and represented in Lily's painting (which resurrects Mrs. Ramsay in the third part of the book). The house mirrors the distant lighthouse, which Mr. Ramsay is determined to finally reach with his son after ten years. The symbolism is compelling: the phallic lighthouse, initially unattainable by the male characters, is replaced by a climactic dinner scene planned and executed by Mrs. Ramsay in the first part. It is only after her death, and years of the house standing empty, that the trip to the lighthouse is realized. In "The Window," Lily attempts to express her attachment to this place and family, an impulse that confuses the house with its matriarch: "what could one say to [Mrs. Ramsay]? 'I'm in love with you?' No, that was not true. 'I'm in love with this all,' waving her hand at the hedge, the house, at the children." Mrs. Ramsay's death, mentioned parenthetically in the middle section "Time Passes," coincides with the

decay and neglect of the house. Upon the family's return after a ten-year absence and an attempt to recreate what had been in the past, Lily realizes that the "house, the place, the morning, all seemed strangers to her."[29] Mrs. Ramsay's absence alienates Lily from the summer home and its family, a change that Lily will later reconcile in her painting.

Mrs. Ramsay's goddess-like centrality is most poignantly revealed in parallel exchanges with Mr. Ramsay in "The Window" and "The Lighthouse." At one point in "The Window," Mrs. Ramsay, sitting with her youngest son and knitting, is interrupted by her husband demanding "sympathy … to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed." In this scene, Mrs. Ramsay is a domestic deity, creating, like powerful guardians of the home before her, a world of life and support: "Flashing her needles, confident, upright, she created drawing-room and kitchen, set them all aglow; bade him take his ease there … She laughed, she knitted."[30] Like Penelope's weaving in *The Odyssey*, Mrs. Ramsay's knitting protects the home for patriarch and children.[31] Her son James feels her expand in response to his father's demand, organically, selflessly, like a "rosy-flowered fruit tree laid with leaves and dancing boughs into which the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of … the egotistical man, plunged and smote, demanding sympathy."[32] Mrs. Ramsay's creativity is fruitful like Mother Nature, even in the face of her husband's industrial-like demands. Like the branches of a tree, her knitting needles create while his metallic "scimitar" disrupts.

Unmarried and unwilling to fulfill the role of nurturer, Lily contrasts with Mrs. Ramsay; her act of creation takes a different art form. In "The Lighthouse," when Lily has returned with the family to the summer home after Mrs. Ramsay's death, Mr. Ramsay similarly approaches her while she is painting: "His immense self-pity, his demand for sympathy poured and spread itself in pools at her feet, and all she did, miserable sinner that she was, was to draw her skirts a little closer round her ankles, lest she should get wet. In complete silence she stood there, grasping her paintbrush."[33] In contrast to Mrs. Ramsay's flashing needles, Lily's creativity is stalled by this masculine demand for her attention and energy, her paintbrush unsuited for the traditional female duties.[34] Woolf draws both women with complexity and empathy: biographer Briggs explains that Woolf "knew the sacrifices that the Victorian ideology of love, marriage and 'family values' had demanded from women, but she mourned its loss in Mrs. Ramsay, even while she enjoyed the exile's freedoms with Lily Briscoe."[35] Ultimately, Lily's ability to create is restored in the

final section of the novel when she completes the painting a decade later, synthesizing the memories of Mrs. Ramsay and the summer house.

In place of knitting needles or paintbrush, Anne Blythe wields a pen in Montgomery's last novel, reading her original poetry to the gathered family in the evenings. As Lefebvre notes, Anne's eventual marriage to Gilbert seemed to end her ambitions as a writer. However, "[r]eaders who were disappointed … that Anne's writing ambitions petered out after her marriage will welcome the revelation of this book of Anne as the author of occasional poems."[36] Her poems are thematically diverse, having been written at various times in her life, as a teenager, as a college student, and as a young teacher. But they are often linked to personified locations such as the sea, an old room, a previous home, or a garden. After her poem "There is a House I Love," her husband asks, "Don't you really think, Anne-girl, that you love places too much?"[37] Her poems are thus linked to the centrality of setting in the collected stories, thematically integrating her writing into the larger text.[38] Anne's poetry, especially in Part One, tends to negotiate topics such as nostalgia for the past, hope for the future (especially regarding children), and comfort in a domestic setting. Not only does Montgomery reveal that Anne continued to write, but her poems become central to the family's healing process after the First World War.

Although Anne appears in various scenes as a secondary character in the stories, in the vignettes she is always at "the family circle at Ingleside."[39] *The Blythes* is arguably "a fractured work,"[40] but the reader's constant return to Anne at Ingleside, like the waves of the ocean and the strobe of the lighthouse, creates a rhythmic flow that moves us, inexorably, back home. So now Anne, the unconventional orphan from *Anne of Green Gables,* is appropriately domesticated, like Mrs. Ramsay. However, her pen presents an interesting confluence of Lily's paintbrush and Mrs. Ramsay's knitting needles. The phallic imagery of the knitting needle, the pen, and the paintbrush reminds the reader that all three women wield a creative power that resides within a patriarchal context. After a reading of Anne's poem "Sea Song," her husband remarks, "I believe I did an ineffaceable wrong in marrying a woman who could write like that and spoiling her career," to which Anne responds, "To think I'd prefer any career to marrying you!"[41] While Montgomery does not explicitly backtrack on Anne's character progression (across many novels) from rebellious outsider to contented wife and mother, she does imply that perhaps the sharp division for women between public artist and private homemaker is unwarranted. Dr. Blythe is certainly less emotionally demanding than Mr. Ramsay, and Anne makes it

clear that she is confident in her choices.

Portrait of an Artist: Lily and Walter

The novels' artists, Walter and Lily, are presented as constructive counterparts to the mother-figures of Mrs. Blythe and Mrs. Ramsay. In *Artist, Society and Sexuality in Virginia Woolf's Novels,* Ann Ronchetti points out, "By focusing largely upon Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf enables herself to investigate two of the forms of creativity available to women—that of painting … and that of women in their traditional domestic roles as wives, mothers, and social managers." 42 Epperly likewise notes that Montgomery uses the relationship between Anne and her most sensitive son, Walter, as a tool to interrogate "what is passed from one generation to another" and how writing and reading poetry preserve memory and process loss.43 Both critics observe the foundational role of the domestic matriarch as a creative linchpin for these novels' exploration of aesthetics and memory. The death of one character—Walter and Mrs. Ramsay—halfway through each book forces the remaining person—Anne and Lily—to interrogate their perception of how art informs grief and the past.

In contrast to the widely beloved Anne and Mrs. Ramsay, both Walter and Lily as artists struggle against social stigmas. The Blythe housekeeper, Susan, disapproves of Walter's writing poetry, worrying that his artistic expressions are not suitably manly. In "The Seventh Evening," Anne reads one of her poems criticizing concepts of success: "Surely 'twill pay for all that we have missed … / Laughter unlaughed, sweet hours of love and sleep, / Hungers unsatisfied and barren dreams, / How the sly years are mocking us!" Susan, somewhat ironically missing the poem's theme, tells Walter, "I do wish you would remember that while writing poetry is a very good amusement for a woman it is no real occupation for a man." She praises Walter's brother Jem for being more "like a boy,"44 a sentiment echoed in several stories such as "The Cheated Child" and "The Road to Yesterday," where proper boys are active outdoors and scorn domestic pastimes.

Likewise, in *To the Lighthouse,* Lily feels the shame of being an old maid, with the young philosopher Charles Tansley's whisper in her head that "[w]omen can't paint, women can't write." Lily struggles "against terrific odds to maintain her courage; to say: 'But this is what I see; this is what I see,' and so to clasp some miserable remnant of her vision to her breast, which a thousand forces did their best to pluck from her." Lily's aesthetic vision is almost physically present—something precious

that she struggles to hold on to in spite of the social, cultural, and personal obstacles that tug at her and try to invalidate her artistry. Lily's admiration of Mrs. Ramsay is coloured by her awareness that she will never be a domestic goddess. Even as Lily finds inspiration in the image of mother and child, her struggle to convey her own vision of the world is at odds with Tansley's taunts and Mrs. Ramsay's "old-fashioned ideas" to "Marry, marry!"45 The voices of Susan and Tansley, members adjacent to the central family, verbalize cultural biases against a sensitive boy who writes poetry and an unwed woman who paints.

But the artists find creative support from the mother-figures, who inspire and even help them complete their artistic visions. The symbolic parallel between Lily and Mrs. Ramsay is established early in the novel while Lily contemplates her painting: Mr. Bankes, observing her sketch, asks what the "triangular purple shape" is on the canvas. When she responds that it is Mrs. Ramsay reading to James, he ventures that it bears no resemblance to human form: "Mother and child then—objects of universal veneration, and in this case the mother was famous for her beauty—might be reduced, he pondered, to a purple shadow without irreverence." Lily then tries to explain her vision and the need for aesthetic balance: "But the picture was not of them, she said. Or, not in his sense … By a shadow here and a light there, for instance. Her tribute took that form if, as she vaguely supposed, a picture must be a tribute." A few pages later, Mrs. Ramsay reflects during a rare moment of stillness, without children and husband, that "one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others." The triangular image is reinforced in the same passage along with her knitting, echoing both Lily's aesthetic vision and Mrs. Ramsay's domesticity from which there is little respite: "Not as oneself did one find rest ever, in her experience (she accomplished here something dexterous with her needles) but as a wedge of darkness."46 And yet she is visible through Lily's creation, which represents Mrs. Ramsay as she is when alone, and in the second half of the book when she is absent. In *The Blythes Are Quoted,* Anne completes Walter's poem by integrating memory into art, in much the same way that Lily completes her aesthetic vision of Mrs. Ramsay. The wedge of darkness foreshadowed by Mrs. Ramsay and realized by Lily after the matriarch's death resembles Anne's own shadows in her tribute to Walter.

Anne's poems organically exist in dialogue with Walter's. As a twelve-year-old, Walter listens with admiration to his mother's poetry, reflecting in the first vignette in the book, "Twilight at Ingleside," that "I wish I could write as good poetry as

mother does. Perhaps I will when I'm as old." This moment contrasts with (and foreshadows) the first vignette in Part Two, "Another Ingleside Twilight," where one of Walter's poems is read posthumously. Dr. Blythe remarks that Anne and Walter's poems resemble each other, noting that Walter's "My House" is like Anne's "The New House," at least "in spirit."[47] Anne even finishes one of Walter's poems that he had drafted just before leaving for the war. As Melanie Fishbane observes in "'My Pen Shall Heal,'" the poem, prophetically titled "The Parting Soul," is completed as a way to "bring mother and son together through words … Anne is moved by her grief to write verse that might be darker than what she had written before because it speaks to her suffering."[48] Anne's connection to Walter emboldens her to honour his art and his voice with her own, haunted by his persistent absence. Montgomery, so often associated with Anne's optimism, now allows her aged character to write creatively and grieve lost innocence.[49]

Art, Memory, and the Great War

The visions of hope and possibility in the first sections of each book are replaced in the latter halves by re-visions of nostalgia, grief, and growth. As Eudora Welty notes in her foreword to *To the Lighthouse*, "Part One is thronging with possibilities."[50] However, like *The Blythes Are Quoted*, the second part of *To the Lighthouse* is sharply affected by the Great War, reflecting the social and cultural shifts that marked a new era. The interludes in both texts, structurally and stylistically jarring, invoke the real sense of vertigo and loss experienced during the war. As critic Randall Stevenson states, "This sense of historical fracture is vividly dramatised in *To the Lighthouse*, whose short, sharp middle section intrudes painfully upon the placid, pre-war family life described in the novel's first part. In its third part, the war's 'chasm' is partly bridged by means of memories, recovering these happier earlier days."[51] Lily's repeated plea "D'you remember?" is echoed in Part Two of *The Blythes* as well: the plots of the last two stories—"A Commonplace Woman" and "The Road to Yesterday"—are built from revisitations of the past, and the Blythe family repeatedly responds to Anne's and Walter's poems with "I remember" and "do you remember?"[52] Shared and validated memories become essential to processing the past, coping with loss, and re-envisioning a changed future.

Despite the obvious effect of the Great War, the interludes of *The Blythes Are Quoted* and *To the Lighthouse* reduce the war itself to a few sentences. In "Time Passes," the descriptive pages of the empty house's decay are briefly punctuated by

parenthetical notes: “[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.]” Prue Ramsay’s marriage and death in childbirth, as well as Andrew Ramsay’s death on a French battlefield, are similarly tucked in among paragraphs about the changing seasons, only briefly distracting from the focus on the house. However, the advance of nature evokes the war raging across Europe—with the departure of the family, the house is closed up, and “those stray airs, advance guards of great armies, blustered in, brushed bare boards, nibbled and fanned, met nothing in bedroom or drawing-room that wholly resisted them.”53 The advance of time, in this section, is as merciless as an invading army. This progression of time and the trauma of the war demand the reader’s consideration more than the death of central family members. Like Montgomery, Woolf seems more invested in the effects of these losses on the families than in the incidents themselves.

Similar to how Woolf bridges the pre-war and postwar narratives through parentheticals, Montgomery represents the war years with a brief note. In it, she foregrounds Walter’s role as the poet of the family, even though all poems in Part One are attributed to Anne. We are told his mother “sympathized with his ambitions,” but Susan “disapproved of [them] darkly.” However, his death in the war changes our understanding of him as an artist: “The First World War came. All the Blythe boys went and Walter was killed at Courcelette. He had destroyed most of his poems before going overseas but left a few with his mother.” The destroyed poems foreshadow his own death and threaten to rob the family of his memories and voice. Anne’s artistic engagement with his poetry thus becomes a dialogue with him—an act of preservation as well as a way to process grief. The interlude affects the family’s relationship to Walter’s poetry as well as to his memory. Even Susan laments that she ever disapproved of his poetry-writing, acknowledging that “writing poetry is just putting into rhyme what everyone feels.”54 As Montgomery often does in her work, she uses a secondary character to express more controversial views;55 after hearing Walter’s poem “The Wild Places,” Susan darkly mutters, “I do not often question the purposes of the Almighty. But I should like to know why He makes a brain that can write things like that and then lets it be crushed to death.”56 Susan’s newfound respect for poetry here marks an uncharacteristically dark condemnation of the war in Montgomery’s fiction.

In both books, the production and consumption of art strengthen memory, and creative work helps negotiate grief and loss.[57] Mrs. Ramsay's death shifts Lily's connection to her painting and the elusive triangular shape upon returning to the house. Her grieving process, like an exorcism, allows her to return to the canvas: "The faint thought she was thinking of Mrs. Ramsay seemed in consonance with this quiet house ... She hoped nobody would open the window or come out of the house, but that she might be left alone to go on thinking, to go on painting."[58] Lily's final line down the middle of the painting balances and divides it, mirroring the construction of the novel itself.[59] As Maud Ellmann observes, "This divided canvas reflects in spatial form the temporal disjunction of the novel, split by the central corridor of 'Time Passes.' In both the painting and the novel, a whole object is produced, yet one in which the pain of separation is acknowledged rather than obliterated."[60]

Montgomery similarly turns to art to acknowledge the "pain of separation." For example, Anne's poem "Grief" describes the progression of mourning from being "unwelcome" and "grim" to being a "comrade."[61] As Jones points out, Part Two of *The Blythes* is notably darker, with poetry becoming a coping mechanism for the grieving Blythes and the stories exploring themes and structures outside of Montgomery's standard formula: "Montgomery, despite her fervent desire to return to prewar realities and sensibilities, knows she cannot; moreover, she cannot maintain the pretense even in an ostensibly prewar literary world."[62] For example, the penultimate story, "A Commonplace Woman," diverges from Montgomery's generally expected themes, although she uses familiar techniques. Through family gossip, reminiscent of that used in *A Tangled Web,* she develops a character sketch of Aunt Ursula, dying in bed upstairs. Ursula is an old maid, "a commonplace woman ... a forgotten woman," an object of pity and derision who led a colourless life. The narrative perspective then shifts upstairs, and the reader follows Ursula's thoughts as she remembers her life: "I have sinned ... so the world would say ... I have been a murderess ... so the world would say... but I have lived!"[63] In her dying moments, Aunt Ursula reveals that she had a clandestine lover and an illegitimate child, whom she surrendered for adoption but remains close to and protects through her vocation as a seamstress. Jones points out that, even as the "truths of Ursula Anderson's life die with her, her family members continue their lives undisrupted by the truth—that Ursula, whom they consider the most insignificant among them, contains all the depths and complexities that they themselves lack."[64] Montgomery sheds her usual technique of sidelining subversive characters—"tucked," as Lefebvre says, "into the

corners of ultimately optimistic narratives”—now creating in Ursula a protagonist who takes revenge on her daughter’s abusive husband without consequence or regret.65

It is perhaps unsurprising that as plot devices death and loss are thematically more central in these postwar texts. Unlike the death of a parent, processed by both Woolf and the Ramsays in *To the Lighthouse*, Montgomery’s book wrestles with a less natural progression: the premature death of a child. As if to accentuate this loss, *The Blythes* begins and ends with Walter’s poems. The opening poem, “The Piper,” was referenced and attributed to Walter Blythe in *Rainbow Valley* (1919) and *Rilla of Ingleside* (1921); in these novels, the poem becomes a symbol of the necessary sacrifice during the First World War. But it does not appear that Montgomery actually wrote the poem at the time, since she notes in the beginning of *The Blythes Are Quoted*, “Although the poem had no real existence, many people have written me, asking where they could get it. It was written recently, but seems even more appropriate now than then.” Situated during the First World War but written on the cusp of a second, “The Piper” is elusive and haunting, paralleling the “sweet and long and low” melody of the Piper to the stirring call for heroes to fight for God and country, for “Freedom … the crown of each native hill.”66 The poem gently echoes the assurances that this would be the last “great war” to restore liberty and conquer tyranny.

In contrast to the whimsical ambiguity of “The Piper,” “The Aftermath” (written by Walter “somewhere in France”) brutally portrays a young soldier’s experience on the battlefield. In this poem, there is no noble sacrifice for the common good, only bloodlust and death. Walter’s narrator describes a hellish scene of depravity and murder: “We were all drunken with horrid joy, / We laughed as devils laugh from hell released, / And, when the moon rose redly in the east, / I killed a stripling boy!” Even more tragically, the final lines nod to Walter’s previous poetry extolling the power of nature and pun on the cheerful family name while describing trauma and loss: “The wind has voices that may not be stilled … / The wind that yester morning was so blithe … / And everywhere I look I see him writhe, / That pretty boy I killed!” The text notes that, unlike the other poems read to the entire family, Anne reads this one only to her son Jem, a veteran of the war himself. Like Montgomery, Anne faces the inevitability of another war, and, after reading “The Aftermath,” she reflects that Walter “could never have lived with his memories.” The thought of her artistic son having to process his experience of war is so troubling to Anne that she

cannot even complete her thoughts, letting her sentences trail off unfinished: “and if he had seen the futility of the sacrifice they made then mirrored in this ghastly holocaust ….” Speaking into his mother’s ellipses, Jem paraphrases his father from earlier in the book: “We forget because we must.” Dr. Blythe, who had commented that “people *do* forget because they have to. The world couldn’t go on if they didn’t,” was responding to one of Anne’s poems about heartbreak and loss; Jem, in contrast, cites selective forgetfulness as a coping mechanism for surviving war.67 In both cases, however, Anne writes and reads poetry as a way to remember, not forget.

Conclusion

The First World War affected both Montgomery and Woolf so intensely that they found themselves struggling to cope with the prospect of a second war of similar magnitude. Montgomery lived in fear that her second son, Stuart, would be drafted as soon as he finished his medical residency. She struggled with depression (and prescribed barbiturates) as well as heartbreak over her eldest son’s chronic behaviour problems. Her final journal entry on 23 March 1942 expresses her fatigue and despair: “My mind is gone—everything in the world I lived for has gone—the world has gone mad. I shall be driven to end my life.”68 Rubio points out that it was an open secret in the family that her death was originally presumed a suicide; the precise cause remains unclear, but her writing in the final days suggests she was struggling with her mental health.69 Woolf’s more explicit suicide note to her husband similarly cites depression and the inability to work: “I feel certain that I am going mad again. I feel we can’t go through another of those terrible times. And I shan’t recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can’t concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do. … I can’t fight any longer. … You see I can’t even write this properly. I can’t read. … I can’t go on spoiling your life any longer.” 70 For both Woolf and Montgomery, “occupation is essential,” and when mental or physical health impeded their writing, life’s meaning slipped away.71

In the novels, Woolf and Montgomery develop artists who manage to create meaning after the war. They rally through grief and loss to weave, write, and paint a new vision from the loss of the past. At the end of *To the Lighthouse*, Lily finishes her painting just as the Ramsays land at the lighthouse: “With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had

my vision."[72] Lily's vision is a labour born out of persistence and reflection. Despite interference from male characters and the Ramsay's losses, she returns to her struggle after a decade to realize her creation. Lily's painting reconciles the pre- and postwar moments, like the delayed journey to the lighthouse, while acknowledging the explicit division, her "line," that remains.

The Blythes Are Quoted also ends with the work of an artist—a poem (possibly the last) by Walter Blythe, imploring that "*We must remember always*; evermore / Must spring be hateful and the dawn a shame … / We shall not sleep as we have slept before / That withering blast of flame."[73] Whereas Lily's final painting realizes her creative vision, providing closure and relief, Walter's voice is more desperate, reflecting not growth or completion, but destruction and loss of self, so much so that Anne ventures it is better that he never returned. As critic Lesley Clement argues, the poem "Aftermath" and a letter to his sister in *Rilla of Ingleside* present the very real possibility that Walter suffered from shellshock,[74] a misunderstood condition poignantly personified by Woolf's Septimus Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway*. And, as Clement points out, "the stripling boy" that Walter's poet kills is uncannily similar to Walter himself, a vision of his own death (or, perhaps, even a death wish).[75] Lily's vision marks a reconciliation with her own identity and that of Mrs. Ramsay, who has faded into a shape, a memory, on the canvas. Walter's death emphasizes both Anne's role as a mother *and* her stature as a poet, if only within her own family. She accepts the role of family poet not only to honour Walter's memory but also to develop, like Lily, her own creative voice in the wake of tragedy and the passage of time. In both cases, the transfer of inspiration results in a matured artist and a developed vision.

The differing conclusions of each book can be attributed to when they were written in the author's lifetime. Several years removed from the First World War and her own childhood, but not yet faced with the prospect of a new war, Woolf portrays a feminine literary legacy that is cautiously optimistic, paying homage to the past with her gaze on the future. Montgomery, at the end of her life, was struggling with chronic health problems, a lifetime of lost friends and family, stress over her sons, and a feeling of detachment from a rapidly modernizing world. She ends her last book with her original character, Anne, unable to muster her signature optimism about the possibilities of tomorrow. Nevertheless, the concluding visions of Lily, Walter, and Anne bring to a close two comparable texts, fragmented narratives woven around the Blythe and Ramsay families. In both books, aesthetic creations in the form of painting, writing, and storytelling become essential ways to process and

remember. Lily's painting with the final line down the middle and Anne's poem, knitted into Walter's, reveal how art both recalls loss and heals grief. But just as importantly, the marked dissonance in the postwar sections of both books reminds us that, as Anne recognizes, "the scar will always be there."76

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- 1 Montgomery, *BAQ* 3.
- 2 Rubio, "Subverting" 71.
- 3 Rubio, "Subverting" 72.
- 4 In *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life*, Julia Briggs notes that Woolf was working on "a cluster of short stories" when she first conceived of *To the Lighthouse* (163), which may partially explain why it structurally parallels *The Blythes Are Quoted*, itself made up of previously written short stories.
- 5 Epperly, afterword 511.
- 6 Welty, foreword xi.
- 7 Briggs, *Virginia Woolf* 180.
- 8 Woolf is firmly fixed within British European Modernism. Montgomery is conventionally categorized as a regional Canadian or late Victorian/Edwardian writer, and often exclusively a writer for children. In spite of being contemporaries, they are rarely examined together by scholars or anthologists.
- 9 Briggs 163.
- 10 Woolf, *Writer's Diary* (27 June 1925): 79.
- 11 Briggs 160.
- 12 Lefebvre, introduction xi.
- 13 Lefebvre, "'That Abominable War!'" 124.
- 14 Lefebvre, introduction x–xi.
- 15 Montgomery, *BAQ* 405.
- 16 Jones, "Shadows of War" 179.
- 17 Montgomery, *BAQ* 304; emphasis in original.
- 18 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 186.

- 19 Briggs 175.
- 20 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 3.
- 21 Kavaloski, *High Modernism* 126.
- 22 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 124.
- 23 Montgomery, *BAQ* 5.
- 24 Rubio, “Subverting” 75.
- 25 Kavaloski 132.
- 26 Woolf, *Writer’s Diary* (3 Sept. 1926): 89.
- 27 Montgomery, *BAQ* 365–66.
- 28 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 134.
- 29 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 19, 146.
- 30 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 37–38.
- 31 There is a wealth of scholarship on the role of weaving, knitting, and sewing as empowering (and subversive) feminine art. I recommend “From Penelope to Pussyhats, The Ancient Origins of Feminist Craftivism” by Stephanie McCarter (lithub.com/from-penelope-to-pussyhats-the-ancient-origins-of-feminist-craftivism/). Maud Ellmann also draws a parallel to Homer’s epic in “A Passage to the Lighthouse”: “The 10-year interlude of ‘Time Passes’ harks back to the 10 years of Odysseus’s roundabout return to his island kingdom Ithaca. Rooted in *The Odyssey*, the motif of the deferred passage makes a spectacular comeback in modernism, notably in Ezra Pound’s *Cantos* and James Joyce’s *Ulysses*” (96).
- 32 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 38.
- 33 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 152–53.
- 34 Part I in *To the Lighthouse*, “The Window,” culminates in a dinner party conceived and hosted by Mrs. Ramsay, who presides “like a priestess over this last supper” (Briggs 173). Lily’s unwillingness to nurture and host is a stark contrast to the Ramsay matriarch.
- 35 Briggs 171.
- 36 Lefebvre, introduction xv.
- 37 Montgomery, *BAQ* 115.
- 38 The first and longest story in *The Blythes Are Quoted*, “Some Fools and a Saint,” is set in a haunted house, which is the catalyst for character development and the romantic conclusion. In “The Twins Pretend,” “Fancy’s Fool,” “The Cheated Child,” and “Fool’s Errand,” the characters’ happiness (finding a loving relative or a future spouse) depends upon returning to a location (an old house or garden) with a fresh perspective and a dream.

- 39 Montgomery, *BAQ* 68.
- 40 Epperly 511.
- 41 Montgomery, *BAQ* 117.
- 42 Ronchetti, *Artist, Society and Sexuality* 62.
- 43 Epperly 515.
- 44 Montgomery, *BAQ* 253–55, 91.
- 45 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 48, 19, 174.
- 46 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 52–53, 62, 63.
- 47 Montgomery, *BAQ* 68–69, 442.
- 48 Fishbane, "'My Pen Shall Heal'" 141.
- 49 Rubio, *Lucy Maud Montgomery* 117–18.
- 50 Welty ix.
- 51 Stevenson, "Broken Mirrors."
- 52 Some examples of the repeated evocation of remembering include conversations after "Robin Vespers," "Wind of Autumn," and "The Change." Stories like "The Road to Yesterday" build dialogue and plot around the prompts "You remember …" and "Do you remember …?"
- 53 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 128–29.
- 54 Montgomery, *BAQ* 363, 376.
- 55 See Rubio, "Subverting" 78–79.
- 56 Montgomery, *BAQ* 374.
- 57 Woolf herself acknowledged the therapeutic role of writing *To the Lighthouse* as a way to revisit her childhood and the complicated relationship with her own deceased parents: "I used to think of [father] and mother daily; but writing the *Lighthouse* laid them in my mind … (I believe this to be true—that I was obsessed with them both, unhealthily; and writing of them was a necessary act.)" Woolf, *Writer's Diary* (28 Nov. 1928): 135.
- 58 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 161.
- 59 Briggs calls "Times Passes" "the brush stroke through the centre that will join the novel's two halves, the Victorian world of her parents and her own times" (174–75). Woolf recognized that the interlude was a new challenge: "I have to give an empty house, no people's characters, the passage of time, all eyeless and featureless with nothing to cling to … Is it nonsense, is it brilliance?" Woolf, *Writer's Diary* (30 Apr. 1926): 87.
- 60 Ellmann 105.
- 61 Montgomery, *BAQ* 480–81.
- 62 Jones 177–78.

- 63 Montgomery, *BAQ* 452, 473.
- 64 Jones 179–80.
- 65 Lefebvre, "'That Abominable War!'" 116.
- 66 Montgomery, *BAQ* 3.
- 67 Montgomery, *BAQ* 509–10, 93; emphasis in original.
- 68 Montgomery, *SJ* 5 (23 Mar. 1942): 350.
- 69 Rubio, *Lucy Maud* 575.
- 70 Qtd. in Rose, *Woman of Letters* 243.
- 71 Woolf, *Writer's Diary* (8 Mar. 1941): 351.
- 72 Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 209.
- 73 Montgomery, *BAQ* 510; emphasis in original.
- 74 Clement, "'Uncanny Beauty'" 57–58.
- 75 Clement 56–57.
- 76 Anne's comment is in response to her husband's observation after a reading of her poem "The Wind": "Your poem reminds me curiously of Walter's ...That you can write so well shows the wound is healing" (Montgomery, *BAQ* 398).

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