

THE MOOD OF THE GOLDEN AGE: PAGANISM,  
ECOTHEOLOGY AND THE WILD WOODS IN L. M.  
MONTGOMERY'S *ANNE* AND *EMILY* SERIES

Kirstie Blair with William V. Thompson<sup>i</sup>

*Abstract*

This essay discusses the intersection of pagan and Christian allusions in Montgomery's depiction of her heroines' love of nature, contextualizing these within the renewed interest in paganism in early twentieth-century literature and concentrating particularly on discussions of trees and woods in the Anne and Emily series. It suggests that the attitudes towards nature and God displayed in these works anticipate themes in current ecotheological discourse.

*Keywords:* Montgomery, paganism, ecotheology, nature

In *Emily Climbs* (1925), the second book of L. M. Montgomery's Emily trilogy, Emily Starr records in her journal how she showed her former teacher and literary mentor, Mr Carpenter, a poem inspired by a rapturous evening walk in the woods. He promptly tears it to shreds:

“Now – *why?*” I said, rather annoyed. “There was nothing wrong about the poem, Mr Carpenter.”

“Not about its body,” he said. “Every line of it, taken by itself, might be read in Sunday School. But its *soul* – what mood were you in when you wrote that, in heaven's name?”

“The mood of the Golden Age,” I said.

“No – of an age far before that. That poem was sheer Paganism, girl, though I don’t think you realize it. To be sure, from the point of view of literature it’s worth a thousand of your pretty songs. All the same, that way danger lies.

Better stick to your own age.”<sup>ii</sup>

‘The Golden Age’, at least as Mr Carpenter interprets it, most likely refers to the classical notion of a pastoral Arcadia of nymphs and shepherds, into which the ‘diabolism’ he senses in Emily’s poem would not intrude, whereas ‘Paganism’ implies a godless time before the dawning of classical civilization. To Montgomery, who invokes ‘the gods of the Golden Age’ as a generic opposition to early twentieth-century industry and modernity in her journal, the ‘Golden Age’ is ambiguously associated with a lost pastoral world of poetry, classical myth, and the British fairy and folklore tradition, always nostalgically recalled and imaginatively recreated through hints and faint survivals.<sup>iii</sup> As she would have been well aware, readers of the 1920s would also have associated the phrase ‘Golden Age’ with popular conceptions of childhood as a time of innocence and intimacy with nature – a time of closeness to this lost world – as exemplified by Kenneth Grahame’s *The Golden Age* (1895) (a book Montgomery loved) and its wistful and joyous depiction of children roaming freely in the English countryside.<sup>iv</sup> Emily’s defiant assertion of Golden Age loyalties is thus both adult – implying her knowledge of the classics and a pre-Christian world – and childish, in that she does not seem to recognize the danger, for a young woman on the verge of adulthood immersed in a small-town Presbyterian environment, of such declarations.

Emily’s description of the walk that inspired this poem notably complicates any clear divisions between paganism, Christianity and classical myth and legend. Setting out on an early spring evening from her repressive Aunt Ruth’s house, she

‘chanted’ passages from the Song of Solomon about the revivication of nature (‘Awake thou north wind, and come, thou south. Blow upon my garden that the spices thereof may flow out’), except that she revises the verses, ‘only I put “woods” in place of “garden”’.<sup>v</sup> Three lines later, she is interpreting the evening as ‘a night when the ancient gods might be met with in the lonely places’, imagining companies of goblins and hearing ‘fairy sounds’ in the atmosphere. After experiencing one of her frequent moments of synaesthetic integration with nature – ‘I stood still and let the loveliness of the evening flow through me like music’ – she returns home as night falls:

I felt as if I were escaping from some fascinating but not altogether hallowed locality – a place given over to paganism and the revels of satyrs. I don’t believe the woods are ever wholly Christian in the darkness.<sup>vi</sup>

By associating paganism with the ‘revels of satyrs’, Emily envisages a more threatening and forbidden version of an earlier woodland vision of ‘Pan piping through moonlight and shadow with his troop of laughing fauns’.<sup>vii</sup> Montgomery’s description of this walk, and of Mr Carpenter’s response to the poem it inspires, are a key moment for the concerns of this essay. They reveal three intertwined strands of her heroines’ passionate response to nature: a revisionary Christianity that may *seem* conventional on the outside, but is doubtfully orthodox in the context of early twentieth-century Canadian Presbyterianism; a response linked to ‘paganism’ and the classical ‘ancient gods’; and a sense of the ‘fairy’. Given that the Biblical passages Emily chooses to express her nature-worship are concerned with female sexuality, the passage also suggests Montgomery’s repeated association of nature and her heroine’s sexual development. Emily’s alteration of the Biblical lines – to claim ‘my woods’

rather than ‘my garden’ - indicates the specific connection between her and the less domesticated aspects of the surrounding natural environment.

By *Emily Climbs*, this was the third time Montgomery had written about this walk in the woods, and the second time she had published on it. In a 1911 *Canadian Magazine* article on ‘Autumn in the Woods’, she concluded:

I am escaping from some fascinating, but not altogether hallowed, locality – a place still given over to paganism and the revels of fauns and satyrs. None of the wild places are ever wholly Christian in the darkness, however much they may seem so in daylight.<sup>viii</sup>

This, in turn, reworks an entry from Montgomery’s journals (not wholly private, of course, since she did intend them for ultimate publication) about a walk in the woods from 1907:

I felt the old, primitive, unreasoning fear that was known to the childhood of the race [...] felt as if I had escaped from some fascinating but not altogether hallowed locality – a place still given over to paganism and the revels of fauns and satyrs. None of the wild places are ever wholly Christianized in the darkness, however much so they may seem by daylight.<sup>ix</sup>

Montgomery’s own statements, perhaps because of her greater age and assured reputation, are more assertive than Emily’s, replacing the uncertainty of ‘I don’t believe’ with a firm statement. Predating Christianity, of course, does not mean pre-dating God. As in *Emily Climbs*, the journal and ‘Autumn in the Woods’ essay blend a Christian perception of nature working with God with the classical, the pagan, and the magical. Near the start of ‘Autumn in the Woods’, Montgomery describes how the scent of pine-trees seems to summon ‘upward and onward to some “far-off, divine event”...some spiritual peak of attainment’, and she continues, ‘Everything is in this

hour – the beauty of classic myths, the primal charm of the silent and the open, the lure of mystery, the beguilement of gramarye’.<sup>x</sup> The ‘far-off, divine event’ is the revelation ‘To which the whole creation moves’ in the determinedly Christian closing lines of Alfred Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* (1850), a poem deeply concerned with reconciling God and the natural world in the light of Victorian scientific developments.<sup>xi</sup> As Montgomery writes religious epiphany into the passage via poetic allusion, however, she also celebrates the autumn woods for recalling decidedly non-Christian cultures. The repeated appearance of these haunting wild woods in her writing, and the numerous related comments associating pagan feelings with nature, indicate the fascination which the notion of paganism held for Montgomery, and her perception that contemporary readers would sympathize with the thrill of finding wildness at the heart of the (relatively) tamed landscapes of Prince Edward Island and Ontario.

When Mr Carpenter tells Emily to avoid paganism by sticking ‘to her own age’ he seems unaware of any irony. Yet nothing could be *more* rooted in the spirit of the age than Emily and Montgomery’s pagan imagination. The period from the 1880s to the 1920s had seen a wide-ranging revival of interest in paganism, reinterpreted primarily as pantheism and nature-worship rather than in the traditional use of ‘pagan’ to mean ‘heathen’ or non-Christian.<sup>xii</sup> Late nineteenth-century ‘neo-pagans’ were particularly concerned with the fruitful links between paganism, Christianity and Nature. As Claire Masurel-Murray and Charlotte Ribeyrol comment in their preface to a recent collection of essays on late-Victorian paganism, writers of the period ‘were not only fascinated by paganism – whether Hellenic, Roman, Egyptian, or Celtic – as a polytheistic and anti-Christian religion...but also by the possible creative interactions of Christianity (and particularly Catholicism) and paganism.’<sup>xiii</sup> Margot

Louis, in her seminal studies of Victorian paganism, similarly notes the ‘striking shift’ in the mythology of the period in that ‘pagan and Christian spiritual impulses were more and more confidently connected and, ultimately, equated.’<sup>xiv</sup> Nature provided the mediating force: for writers like Thomas Hardy, disillusioned with Victorian Christianity, nature-worship supplied ‘a positive model to found a new ethical model on a religious basis’.<sup>xv</sup> In addition, as Dennis Denisoff has argued, neo-paganism contained ‘eco-political potential’, anticipating twentieth-century ‘green’ movements in its central emphasis on nature’s mystical vitality.<sup>xvi</sup>

What this essay argues is that Montgomery is entirely in line with popular transatlantic literature of her period (much of which, like Montgomery’s own fiction, was aimed for both child and adult readers) in her blending of nature-worship and Christianity, yet that the context of Canadian Presbyterian culture means that this must be carefully negotiated by her heroines, who have a greater need to reconcile Church and Nature than do many of their literary contemporaries. Given the scope of this topic, I concentrate on one key aspect of the natural world, woods and trees, and how these are deployed in Montgomery’s interrelated Christian and pagan language and themes.<sup>xvii</sup> I also argue that in these efforts, Montgomery’s works make a powerful contribution to children’s literature and ecotheology. In repeatedly emphasizing a connection to God felt through nature and imaged in terms of companionship between all living things – ‘wind and stars and fireflies...all tangled up together into something unutterably sweet and enchanting’<sup>xviii</sup> – Emily and Anne speak to the ecotheological imperative (as formulated by Celia Deane-Drummond) to view God as ‘in loving relationship with Creation’ rather than as tyrannizing over it, and to understand ‘the meaning of interconnectedness in ecological relationships’.<sup>xix</sup> They recognize the key principle that Larry Rasmussen formulates as ‘communion’,

‘creation’s internal relatedness and active interdependence’.<sup>xx</sup> Both, to differing degrees, see themselves as ‘earthkeepers’, or as ‘co-carers’ with God, ‘imitating God’s own care for creation’, in terms used to distinguish an older Christian ethics of ‘stewardship’ from a newer ideal of equality and respect in caring for the earth.<sup>xxi</sup> In their perception of mystical forces working through all of nature, Emily and Anne also embrace a sense of ‘deep incarnation’, a theory of growing significance in ecotheological thought, in which God, through Christ, is not simply incarnated in human flesh but is united with ‘the matter of the universe, with the evolutionary processes that constitute biological life on Earth, with all creatures...in solidarity with the whole community of life on Earth.’<sup>xxii</sup> And being pagan girls of their time, such eco-theological interests are, inevitably, mediated through references to Pan as much as through references to Christ.

Montgomery’s uses of nature, and her potential in introducing young readers to ecological concerns, have been much discussed by critics. Irene Gammel has influentially argued for the significance of ‘feminized erotic landscapes’ in Montgomery, and has analyzed her nature-writing in *Anne of Green Gables* and elsewhere in depth, though without dwelling on the specifically religious and Christian significance of Montgomery’s imagery.<sup>xxiii</sup> Drawing on the body of criticism on gender and nature in Montgomery, Nancy Holmes, in an important essay, argues that she can be read as ‘a proto-ecofeminist writer’, and convincingly analyses the complexities and ambiguities in her ‘deep awareness of the ideology around gender that is transferred onto our relationships with nature’: this essay revisits scenes discussed by Holmes, but with a greater emphasis on the role of gods and God in Montgomery’s language and themes.<sup>xxiv</sup> Recent critical work has also reconsidered Montgomery as a religious writer. Catherine Posey, for example, comments that Anne

‘recognizes the connection between the natural world and the sacred, and her wonder at this beauty encourages her own spiritual identity’, and briefly notes that this potentially enables a reading of Montgomery not just as ecofeminist, but in terms of ecofeminist theology.<sup>xxv</sup> Most significantly in relation to children’s literature and theology, Monika Hilder argues that Montgomery critiques aspects of the practice of Christianity in her culture from her position within it, and in doing so ‘creates a feminist theology that restores imagination and aesthetics as valid ways of knowing, celebrates Nature as a means to spiritual experience, and honours the child and the “childlike”’.<sup>xxvi</sup> Hilder’s wide-ranging discussions include commentary on Montgomery’s theological vision of the natural world, and this essay agrees with her conclusions that Montgomery is often quietly, and humorously, revisionary in her position on Christianity in her culture, and that her views on the natural world do not so much set Romantic pantheism in opposition to Christianity as embrace a Christian celebration of nature.

The role that neo-paganism or paganism plays in children’s literature of this period more broadly, particularly in works like Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) and Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* (1911), has also attracted significant critical attention. Discussing the famous encounter between the animals and Pan in *The Wind in the Willows*, Elizabeth Hale comments that it is part of a body of ‘neo-pagan texts’ for children in the period, which tend to set such moments in contrast ‘to what we might think of as the urban, rule-bound, mostly Christian adult culture’.<sup>xxvii</sup> Grahame’s nature-worshipping *Golden Age* children and the ‘earth-effluence’ that they feel stand with Burnett’s protagonists in *The Secret Garden*, who resemble Emily and Anne in that the ‘Magic’ they associate with the renewal of the garden is simultaneously pagan and Christian, albeit in a version of Christianity that



exists largely outside the formal strictures of religion.<sup>xxviii</sup> Holly Blackford additionally argues that *The Secret Garden* (and other works of the period) use the figure of Persephone and the renewed interest in ancient goddesses in classical scholarship to reconcile ‘goddess or nature worship with Christianity’.<sup>xxix</sup> Nature-worship, linked to environmental concerns, also makes an important appearance in early twentieth-century American literature about/for children through Gene Stratton-Porter’s *Freckles* (1904) and *A Girl of the Limberlost* (1909), works often cited as influences on Montgomery’s novels.<sup>xxx</sup> None of the protagonists in these works, however, are as firmly embedded in the religious and social structures of a church as Anne and Emily. Although children’s literature of the period does generally value childhood as ‘part of a spiritual domain in a world becoming less spiritual’, few child heroes display any significant allegiance to organized religion and its operations within their community.<sup>xxxi</sup> Montgomery differs, then, in her depiction of her heroines’ struggle to conform to Presbyterian culture, and their forced awareness of the social emphasis on conformity from quite early childhood onwards.

In 1897, Montgomery wrote in her journals:

Often and often, when I am alone in the woods I will put my arms tenderly about some old, gray-lichened trunk and press my face to it, feeling its life and balm flowing through every vein in my body as if it and I were one...Perhaps I *was* a tree in, some other state of existence and that may be why I love trees so and feel so utterly and *satisfyingly* at home in the woods. I have always had a sort of leaning to that old doctrine of transmigration.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Transmigration of the soul may have been an ‘old doctrine’, but it was also wildly fashionable by the late nineteenth century. Such comments show Montgomery’s willingness to engage with alternative spiritual movements, and the way in which her

writings draw on the eco-pagan currents of the period. As many critics have noted, the link between trees and young girls is highly over-determined and ‘almost overwhelming’ in Montgomery’s fiction.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Both Anne and Emily, echoing their creator, profoundly identify with particular trees and woods, in every location in which they live. In contrast to Rachel Lynde’s early pronouncement in *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) that ‘Trees aren’t much company’ or Diana’s pragmatic response to one of Anne’s flights of fancy in *Anne of Avonlea* (1909), ‘Trees haven’t souls’, they view trees as vital, companionate beings: ‘That white birch you caught me kissing is a sister of mine. The only difference is, she’s a tree and I’m a girl, but that’s no real difference.’<sup>xxxiv</sup> One of Anne’s earliest pronouncements on nature describes her sympathy with the trees outside the orphanage ‘a few poor teeny-weeny things out in front with little whitewashed cagey things about them’, and her desire to return them to a natural environment where they will flourish as part of an ecosystem: ‘a great big woods with other trees all around you and little mosses and Junebells growing over your roots and a brook not far away and birds singing in your branches’: note how Anne moves from talking *about* trees to recalling her speech *to* them.<sup>xxxv</sup> The connection to Anne taking root in the community of Avonlea is hardly subtle, but it also shows her already imagining and allying herself with the community of nature.

In both series, a key ‘pagan’ image is that of the dryad or wood-nymph. In the first dryad reference, in *Anne of Green Gables*, Anne excitedly tells Marilla that she and Diana have agreed to rename the local spring the ‘Dryad’s Bubble’: ‘Isn’t that a perfectly elegant name? I read a book once about a spring called that. A dryad is a sort of grown-up fairy, I think.’<sup>xxxvi</sup> Anne’s lack of knowledge about the nature of classical dryads, though it enables a fruitful connection with Celtic fairy story, is significant because it marks a formative difference between Anne and Emily. Emily’s

far more pronounced attachment to classical paganism is foreshadowed in her first walk through Lofty John's Bush:

Here and there the young maple branches interlaced as if to make a screen for dryad faces – Emily knew all about dryads, thanks to her father – and the great sheets of moss under the trees were fit for Titania's couch.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Unlike Anne, Emily's early childhood has been shaped by an unorthodox, literary, parent, who has presumably taken care to introduce her to Shakespeare and the classics, and so her imaginative perception of nature is attuned to classical paganism from an early age. By *Anne of Avonlea*, Anne has learnt what a dryad is as her reading and education progress. Among many other references, she imagines dreaming she is a 'dryad or a wood-nymph', pictures herself as 'a dryad living in an old pine', and enables the creative imagination of her pupil, Paul, in supporting his story of a dryad who left her tree and caused its death.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Nymphs and dryads were linked, in the cultural imagination of this period, with the goddess-worship most influentially formulated by the classical scholar Jane Harrison, who argued that the pantheon of Greek gods eventually developed from the first goddess, 'Gaia the Earth', and that 'the Earth-Mother and each and every local nymph was mother not only of man but of all creatures that live; she is the "Lady of the Wild Things."<sup>xxxix</sup> Emily and Anne are therefore in touch, through their association with wood-nymphs, with ancient traditions of feminine nature-worship as imagined by the neo-pagans of their time.

Wood-nymphs and dryads in the form of innocent and 'natural', yet highly eroticized, young women, haunt the fiction of the period, from Hardy's heroines (such as the pagan Tess of the D'Urbervilles or Marty South in *The Woodlanders* (1887)) to characters like Hazel in Mary Webb's popular *Gone to Earth* (1917), a pagan girl who is 'an incarnation of the secret woods.'<sup>xl</sup> Dryads, as beautiful naked women, also

featured repeatedly in late Victorian art; including Thomas Benjamin Kennington's 'Nest of the Dryad', John William Waterhouse's 'A Hamadryad', and, in a work that alludes to the death of paganism and the coming of Christ, Evelyn De Morgan's 'The Dryad.'<sup>xli</sup> The dryad was perceived, like Pan, as a literary symbol of the inevitable destruction of wild nature by modern civilization, and its taming by Christianity. This is most strikingly expressed in Hans Christian Andersen's mid-century fairy story 'The Dryad' (1868) – probably the basis of Paul's dryad tale in *Anne of Avonlea* – in which a dryad's insistent longing to see the marvels of Paris is granted by a shadowy Christ-figure when her tree is taken to replace one killed by city pollution. Taking on human form, she roams the city, increasingly disillusioned and weakened from lack of contact from nature, until she collapses on the steps of a church:

What music! Such notes the Dryad had never heard, and yet she seemed to hear in them well-known voices. They came from the depths of the heart of the whole creation. She thought she heard the rustling of the old oak tree, she thought she heard the old priest talking about great deeds, and about famous names, and of what God's creatures had power to give as a gift to future times, and must give it in order to win, by that means, eternal life for itself.

The tones of the organ swelled and pealed, and spoke in song: "Thy longing and desire uprooted thee from thy God-given place. It became thy ruin, poor Dryad!"<sup>xlii</sup>

Christian worship and the voices of nature are blended in this climactic scene. The overt Christian and ecological moral of the story (which is also a moral about women's place in society) is that nature should be cherished, not exploited by modern civilization for its own ends. The dryad's selfish failure to keep to her humble place in

the Christian cosmos leads to her death in the hostile city, and that of her tree. Such dryads provide female figures (as opposed to fauns or satyrs) around which Anne and Emily's pagan imaginings of one-ness with nature, and their desire to preserve beautiful natural environments, can coalesce, but the classical and Victorian associations of these figures with tragic sexuality and loss also renders this identification uneasy.

As both heroines grow older, their spiritual progression is shown by a gradual abandoning of belief in and attachment to personified nature – fairies, dryads, nymphs, and Emily's 'Wind Woman' – and a shift towards a more diffused sense of, as Montgomery put it in her journal, the 'deep primal gladness' of the woods and their connection to 'heaven and eternity and spirit'.<sup>xliii</sup> Montgomery shows this development though evoking two of her favourite American poems, both of which powerfully envisioned the forest as divine space: Emerson's unfinished 'The Poet', which opens 'The gods talk in the breath of the woods,/They talk in the shaken pine' (Dean Priest quotes this to Emily in *Emily Climbs*) and William Cullen Bryant's 'A Forest Hymn'.<sup>xliv</sup> Anne cites the first line of Bryant's poem on a forest walk with her friend Phil, in *Anne of the Island*:

"The woods were God's first temples," quoted Anne softly. "One can't help feeling reverent and adoring in such a place. I always feel so near Him when I walk among the pines"<sup>xlv</sup>

In (mis)quoting 'A Forest Hymn' (like Emily, Anne inserts 'woods' where there are none, as Bryant has 'groves') Anne supplies a model for how her pagan leanings are becoming compatible with Christian nature-worship, since Bryant argues that the sublimity of the forest caused pagan man to worship God in ages before Christ:

For his simple heart

Might not resist the sacred influences  
Which, from the stilly twilight of the place,  
And from the gray old trunks that high in heaven  
Mingled their mossy boughs, and from the sound  
Of the invisible breath that swayed at once  
All their green tops, stole over him, and bowed  
His spirit with the thought of boundless power  
And inaccessible majesty.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Allusions to Emerson and Bryant, of course, just like Emily's allusion to Titania and Anne's naming of the Dryad's Bubble after a half-remembered book, serve to show the extent to which Montgomery and her heroines' perceptions of the woods are consciously filtered through literature. Gammel notes that Anne's new names for features of the landscape 'map a romantic geography that is portable and exportable across national, temporal and cultural borders', and Montgomery's nature-writing is unquestionably generic rather than specific, rooted in literary cliché.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Montgomery is, however, conscious of how her allusions, whether to dryads or to the transcendentalist poets, might operate in a Canadian context. While the woods of Prince Edward Island are hardly the forest primeval of H. W. Longfellow's famous *Evangeline* (1847) (set in Acadia, not far from Nova Scotia), or indeed the 'densest primeval forest' of Frederick P. Grove's *Over Prairie Trails* (1922), Montgomery appreciated the significance of the primal forest in the Canadian cultural imagination and the threat that reckless logging would result, in Grove's words, in a 'Nation's heritage' being discarded.<sup>xlviii</sup> In common with many Canadian writers of her time, of course, she does not recognize that these primeval woods were long inhabited by indigenous First Nations people, with their own significant relationships

to trees and forests.<sup>xlix</sup> Rather, her imagery of wood-nymphs and fairies, no less than Grove's evocation of Homer in relation to the sublimity of the Canadian winter landscape, seeks to transplant the resonance of the ancient gods into a new world.<sup>l</sup> Anne and Emily graft the folklore and fairytale heritage of Scottish emigrants and the classical and English literary tradition onto Canadian woods, precisely to give their experience of those woods cultural authority. They have taken to heart the message of another of Montgomery's key poetic intertexts, John Greenleaf Whittier's 'To – [Lines Written After a Summer's Day Excursion]', that 'The Beauty which old Greece or Rome/ Sung, painted, wrought, lies close at home' and that 'The outlines of incarnate grace' and the 'hymns of gods' can be heard and seen as easily in nineteenth-century America as in ancient Greece.<sup>li</sup> And if such intertextuality helped to give Montgomery's works a familiarity that enabled them to become international bestsellers, it does also make a theological, or eco-theological argument. As God is immanent in *all* woods and forests, across temporal and geographical distances, they are all equally sacred spaces worthy of preservation. If settlers in Canada can experience a sense of the numinous, of the ancient gods and the Golden Age, in the forests, it is not because they brought it there, but because it is, through the felt presence of the divine, inherent in this aspect of nature. The trees of Lover's Lane or Lofty John's Bush are thus no less worthy of respect, veneration and preservation than the pines of Helicon or the cedars of Lebanon.

In both series, Anne and Emily put this intuition into action by actively protecting and indeed producing woodland; Anne through the Avonlea Village Improvement Society, and Emily in saving and then buying Lofty John's Bush. Both instances show how Anne and Emily, rather than rejecting the forces of organized and domesticated Presbyterianism in favour of pagan nature, compromise with them.

They also, I would argue, show Anne and Emily moving towards ‘an ecotheological ethics of responsible participation’, in Michael S. Hogue’s terms, in which the metaphor of ‘participation’ enables an appreciation of the ‘ineluctably tangled kinship of humans with all other living forms and the unique responsibilities of human participants within the natural world.’<sup>liii</sup> Holmes and others have commented that Anne’s response to the chopping down of her beloved grove of trees, Idlewild, is dealt with in a cursory and ‘curiously offhand’ manner in *Anne of Green Gables*, and that Anne’s ‘eye to the romance’ of this destruction even as she weeps over it somewhat undermines her green credentials.<sup>liiii</sup> It is, however, arguable that Anne’s delayed response to this loss comes not in *Anne of Green Gables* but in the focus on encouraging the community to plant trees in *Anne of Avonlea*. By setting up an ‘improvement’ society, she harnesses what Mary Rubio sees as a key characteristic of Scottish Presbyterian culture and uses it to benefit her local environment.<sup>liv</sup> A key discussion between Gilbert and Anne in chapter 19 opens with Gilbert comparing Anne ‘teasingly’ to ‘a real dryad’, to which Anne responds noncommittally, ‘I love birch trees’, showing Gilbert that she is still a virginal child of nature by ‘laying her cheek against the creamy satin of the slim bole’ of a tree, in the caress denied to him. But the discussion then turns to practicality rather than romance:

“Then you’ll be glad to hear that Mr. Major Spencer has decided to set out a row of white birches all along the front row of his farm, by way of encouraging the A.V.I.S.,” said Gilbert ... “And Mr William Bell is going to set out a spruce hedge along his road front and up his lane.”<sup>lv</sup>

Anne adds that the Ladies Aid society (a Church organization) have agreed to help their efforts, that the ‘trees we planted on the church grounds are flourishing’, and tells Gilbert of her plans for an ‘arbor day’ the following year, which duly comes to



pass and results in ‘two hundred young trees’ being planted.<sup>lvi</sup> Gilbert’s willingness to assist Anne in community tree-planting enterprises marks him as a far more valuable potential husband than does his comparison of her to a dryad. Anne as nascent adult, while still in love with the woods rather than the neat hedges sponsored by the A. V. I. S., has recognized that she can best serve God, nature *and* her community through what Bauckham terms a Biblical ideal of ‘caring responsibility’ towards the natural world, fulfilling in her own environment God’s promise in Isaiah 41:19, ‘I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the olive tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together.’<sup>lvii</sup>

Emily, who is considerably more detached from her local community than Anne, devotes herself not to planting trees but to saving the grove known as Lofty John’s Bush from destruction, which will simultaneously preserve her local patch of wild woods and protect the cultured garden of New Moon, which relies on its shelter. In this, she enlists the local Catholic priest (a highly transgressive move for a twelve year old Protestant girl), who somewhat surprisingly turns out to be one of Montgomery’s most sympathetic clerical characters because his Irish background enables a connection with Emily’s pagan childhood:

You may call yourself av New Moon and av any religion you like, but the fact remains that you belong to the Golden Age and the old gods. That’s why I must save your precious bit av greenwood for you.<sup>lviii</sup>

Father Cassidy continues by expressing his own indignation that someone would ‘destroy for nothing but a grudge those fine old trees that have taken half a century to grow’, and suggests that a man who destroys a tree ‘except when it is really necessary should be hanged as high as Haman on a gallows made from the wood av it.’<sup>lix</sup> While this rhetoric is deliberately designed to impress Emily, his Biblical reference is

arguably an ecotheological interpretation of a famous story: Haman's sin of attempting to persecute and destroy a people (the Jews) is made equivalent to the persecution of nature, and Emily implicitly takes on the role of Esther, saviour of her people. Father Cassidy is aligned to Mr Carpenter in a shared recognition of Emily's precocious poetic talent and pagan attachments to nature. Yet it is the priest, rather than the avowedly irreligious Mr Carpenter, who recognizes an attachment to the Golden Age and the old gods as valuable – in literary, and potentially in ecotheological terms – rather than dangerous. By the end of the series, Emily marks her determination to settle near New Moon and support the community by spending her literary profits on buying Lofty John's Bush – '*not* Lofty John's bush any more. "Emily Byrd Starr's bush!"' – a moment that is arguably a truer ending for the novel than her marriage to Teddy:

All the lovely things in it are mine: its moonlit vistas, the grace of its one big elm against the starlight; its shadowy little dells; its June-bells and ferns; its crystalline spring; its wind music... No one can ever cut it down or desecrate it in any way.

I am so happy. The wind is my comrade and the evening star my friend.<sup>lx</sup>

Although Emily first figures her possession of the woods as ownership, she ends the entry by asserting companionship and friendship with nature. And in her journal entry on the following page, the possessiveness is reversed:

"You are mine," called the sea beyond Blair Water.

"We have a share in her," said the hills.

"She is my sister," said a jolly little fir-tree.<sup>lxi</sup>

Emily's relationship with the natural world, as an adult, is thus one of kinship, mutual care in the assurance of God's presence. She may be the only pagan girl of the early twentieth century who not only survives and flourishes, but gains a wood of her own.

Montgomery's two series model for young readers a way of seeing nature interfused with God, filled with distinctive individual life and animation. As eco-theologian Sigurd Bergmann argues:

Animism allows humans to perceive and interact with non-human life forms as living beings with unique and individual person-like identities. The faith in the Holy Spirit as Giver of Life then appears naturally in the horizon of perceiving the environment as an animated biography and topography, created, inhabited and perfected by the triune Creator. God animates creation through, or better *as*, the breathing and indwelling spirit ... [S]pirits are not regarded as pagan counter-beings but as co-workers with and guardians of the Holy Spirit; spiritual animations of natural life forms are not seen as simply superstitious and magic but as valuable cultural skills to make oneself at home in Creation with the Spirit and to restore our home, the Earth, in synergy with her.<sup>lxii</sup>

This is an extraordinarily resonant passage for our understanding of Montgomery's works, as it enables us to see Anne and Emily's pagan imagination precisely as a 'cultural skill' of value to their Christian faith. It also suggests that popular Christian children's literature over a century old, in imagining how a (or indeed the) Spirit 'indwells nature as its interanimating force', was already thinking through some of the concerns of eco-theology in the present day.<sup>lxiii</sup> Montgomery's series show how nature-loving girls might negotiate both a particular culture of (relatively) repressive and conservative religion and a wider transatlantic culture that, in the period between

the first Anne book in 1908 and the last Emily book in 1927, was deeply engaged with questions of the relationship between Christianity, paganism, and the natural world. Her books are rooted in the cultural concerns of their period, yet, in the way in which they manage these questions, invite broader considerations of the charged relationship between children, nature and God in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

---

<sup>i</sup> This essay was produced by Blair, based on a premise, initial argument and draft material on the ‘pagan imagination’ in Montgomery by Thompson. The text of the essay is in Blair’s words and represents her views.

<sup>ii</sup> L. M. Montgomery, *Emily Climbs* (London: Virago, 2013), p. 288.

<sup>iii</sup> See entry for 23 November 1901, in M. H. Rubio and E. Hillman Waterston (eds.), *The Complete Journals of L. M. Montgomery. The PEI Years, 1901-11* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 34.

<sup>iv</sup> Montgomery was given a copy of *The Golden Age* in 1909 (and *The Wind in the Willows* in 1913): she said she had read it ‘a score of times’. See J. H. Litster, “‘The Golden Road of Youth’: L. M. Montgomery and British Children’s Books’ (2004), reprinted in B. Lefebvre (ed.), *The L. M. Montgomery Reader*, vol 2: A Critical Heritage (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), pp. 305-324, p. 306.

<sup>v</sup> Montgomery, *Emily Climbs*, p. 280, citing Song of Solomon 4:16. All Biblical references are to the King James Bible.

<sup>vi</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 281, 282.

<sup>vii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

---

<sup>viii</sup> ‘Seasons in the Woods’ is reprinted in B. Lefebvre (ed.), *The L. M. Montgomery Reader* vol 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014). For this quote from ‘Autumn Woods’, see p. 88. Lefebvre’s illuminating notes comment on the recycling of these sentences in *Emily Climbs*.

<sup>ix</sup> 18 November 1907, in Rubio and Waterston, *The PEI Years: 1901-11*, p. 177. Montgomery’s association between ‘primitivism’ and ‘the childhood of the race’ invokes popular anthropological theories of her time (now discredited) in which children were thought to recapitulate in their development the progress of man from primitivism to civilization. For a useful summary of these theories see J. Reid, ‘Childhood and Psychology’, in P. Fielding (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Louis Stevenson* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 41-52.

<sup>x</sup> ‘Autumn Woods’, in Lefebvre, I, pp. 86, 87.

<sup>xi</sup> A. Tennyson, ‘Epilogue’, *In Memoriam* (1850), in C. Ricks (ed.), *The Poems of Tennyson*, 3 vols (Harlow: Longman, 1987), II, p. 458.

<sup>xii</sup> On this shift, see the sample entries in the OED, which show ‘nature-worship’ increasingly used as a primary meaning from the 1890s onwards. For a broader discussion of the ‘languages’ of paganism (focused on Britain, and with some discussion of children’s authors), see R. Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>xiii</sup> C. Masurel-Murray and C. Ribeyrol (eds.), ‘Paganism in Late Victorian Britain’, *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens* 80 (2014): <https://cve.revues.org/1454>. ‘Preface’, para. 4.

<sup>xiv</sup> M. K. Louis, ‘Gods and Mysteries: The Revival of Paganism and the Remaking of Mythography through the Nineteenth Century’, *Victorian Studies* 47.3 (2005) 329-61, p. 338.

- 
- <sup>xv</sup> M. Panter, 'Paganism in *Tess of the Durbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*: The Possibility of Faith and Ethics in a Darwinian World', *CVE* 80 (2014): <https://cve.revues.org/1490>, para. 2.
- <sup>xvi</sup> D. Denisoff, 'The Dissipating Nature of Decadent Paganism from Pater to Yeats', *Modernism/Modernity* 15.3 (2008) 431-446, p. 443.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Forests, woods and trees are highly significant in environmental writing. For an influential, wide-ranging study of the forest in Western cultural imagination, see R. P. Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- <sup>xviii</sup> Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* (New York: Aladdin, 2014), p. 255.
- <sup>xix</sup> C. Deane-Drummond, *Gaia and Green Ethics: Implications of Ecological Theology* (Nottingham: Grove, 1993), p. 8. For a brief but helpful discussion of feminist ecotheology, its roots in earlier ideas of 'paganism' and an emerging 'ethics of care' see L. Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 218 and passim.
- <sup>xx</sup> L. L. Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 17.
- <sup>xxi</sup> J. I. Kureethadam, *Creation in Crisis: Science, Ethics, Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014), p. 329. See his chapter 10 (pp. 329-61), 'The Ecological Sin of Irresponsible Stewardship' and R. Bauckham's critique of the notion of stewardship from a biblical perspective in *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 2010), pp. 1-36. On the 'earthkeeping' ethic, see O. Gelderloos, *Eco-Theology: The Judeo-Christian*

---

*Tradition and the Politics of Ecological Decision-Making* (Glasgow: Wild Goose/Centre of Human Ecology, University of Edinburgh, 1992), p. 41.

<sup>xxii</sup> D. Edwards, 'Where on Earth is God? Exploring an Ecological Theology of the Trinity in the Tradition of Athanasius', in E. M. Conradi, S. Bergmann, C. Deane-Drummond and D. Edwards (eds.), *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 11-30, p. 27. 'Deep incarnation' is a phrase associated with the Danish theologian Niels Gregersen, coined in dialogue with the ecocritical theory of 'deep ecology'. For recent perspectives on deep incarnation, see N. H. Gregersen (ed.), *Incarnation: On the Scope and Depth of Christology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).

<sup>xxiii</sup> I. Gammel, "'My Secret Garden": Dis/Pleasure in L. M. Montgomery and F. P. Grove' (1999), reprinted in Lefebvre, II, pp. 236-249, p. 239 and 'Embodied Landscape Aesthetics in *Anne of Green Gables*', *The Lion and the Unicorn* 34.2 (2010) 228-47. For example, Gammel's outstanding reading of the famous description of the sunset on Anne's arrival at Avonlea ('Embodied Landscape Aesthetics', pp. 233-4) does not discuss the significance of the comparison to 'a great rose window' in a cathedral, or that the posture of 'thin hands clasped' adopted by Anne is one of prayer (*Anne of Green Gables*, p. 25).

<sup>xxiv</sup> N. Holmes, 'How Green is *Green Gables*?: An Eco-Feminist Perspective on L. M. Montgomery', in J. Mitchell (ed.), *Storm and Dissonance: L. M. Montgomery and Conflict* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), pp. 373-390. I am grateful to the author for supplying a copy of this essay.

<sup>xxv</sup> C. Posey, 'Ethereal Etchings: Connecting with the Natural World in Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), *Emily of New Moon* (1923) and *Magic for Marigold* (1929)' in T. Doughty and D. Thompson (eds.), *Knowing Their Place:*

---

*Identity and Space in Children's Literature* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), pp. 95-108, p. 98. See also J. R. Sorfleet, 'From Pagan to Christian: The Symbolic Journey of Anne of Green Gables', in A. Hudson and S. Cooper (eds.), *Windows and Words: A Look at Canadian Children's Literature in English* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1999), pp. 175-84. Sorfleet discusses Anne's spiritual journey in broad terms.

<sup>xxvi</sup> M. B. Hilder, 'Imagining the Ultimate Kindred Spirit: The Feminist Theological Vision in L. M. Montgomery', in M. A. Beavis, E. Guillemin and B. H. Pell (eds.), *Feminist Theology with a Canadian Accent* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 2008), pp. 307-330, p. 308; and "'That Unholy Tendency to Laughter': L. M. Montgomery's Iconoclastic Affirmation of Faith in *Anne of Green Gables*", *Canadian Children's Literature* 113-4 (2004) 34-55. See also Hilder's entry on 'Lucy Maud Montgomery' in J. D. Smith and J. T. Kurian (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Christian Literature*, 2 vols (Lanham MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), II, pp. 468-70. I am grateful to the author for assisting me in accessing these works.

<sup>xxvii</sup> E. Hale, 'Classics, Children's Literature, and the Character of Childhood, from *Tom Brown's Schooldays* to *The Enchanted Castle*', in L. Maurice (ed.), *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 17-29, p. 24.

<sup>xxviii</sup> K. Grahame, *The Golden Age*, illustrated by M. Parrish (New York: Dover, 2005), p. 10, 'I had no words then to describe it, that earth-effluence of which I was so conscious'. See also F. Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), especially chapter XVI, in which Ben Weatherstaff teaches the children to sing the Doxology and Colin wonders whether God and the Magic 'are the same thing'.



---

<sup>xxix</sup> H. Blackford, 'Maiden, Mother, Mysteries: The Myth of Persephone in *The Secret Garden*', in J. C. Horne and J. S. Sanders (eds.), *Frances Hodgson Burnett's The Secret Garden: A Children's Classic At 100* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2011), pp. 3-21, p. 18.

<sup>xxx</sup> On Stratton-Porter's environmentalism and Montgomery see C. Thomas, 'Anne Shirley's American Cousin: *The Girl of the Limberlost*' in M. H. Rubio (ed.), *Harvesting Thistles: The Textual Garden of L. M. Montgomery* (Guelph: Canadian Children's Press, 1994), pp. 58-63.

<sup>xxxi</sup> A. E. Gavin and A. F. Humphries, 'Worlds Enough and Time: The Cult of Childhood in Edwardian Fiction', in Gavin and Humphries (eds.), *Childhood in Edwardian Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), pp. 1-22, p. 7.

<sup>xxxii</sup> 25 April 1897, in Rubio and Waterston (eds.), *The Complete Journals of L. M. Montgomery. The PEI Years, 1889-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 364.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Holmes, p. 375.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> *Anne of Green Gables*, p.5; *Anne of Avonlea* (New York: Aladdin, 2015), pp. 54, 101.

<sup>xxxv</sup> *Anne of Green Gables*, pp. 22-3.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon* (London: Virago, 2013, first published 1923), p. 78.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> *Anne of Avonlea*, pp. 54, 101, 231.

<sup>xxxix</sup> J. Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), pp. 261, 264.

---

<sup>xi</sup> M. Webb, *Gone to Earth* (Leicester: Charwood, 1982), p. 74. The pervasive culture of tragic dryad heroines is beautifully parodied in Stella Gibbons' *Elfine*, a 'dryad' and child of nature. S. Gibbons, *Cold Comfort Farm* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2006, first published 1932), chapter XI and passim.

<sup>xli</sup> For a discussion of this painting which also considers the wider culture of dryads in art and literature, see E. Lawton-Smith, *Evelyn Pickering De Morgan and the Allegorical Body* (London: Associated University Presses, 2002), pp. 84-6.

<sup>xlii</sup> H. C. Andersen, 'The Dryad' (1868), text from 'Hans Christian Andersen: Fairy Tales and Stories': <http://hca.gilead.org.il/dryad.html>, consulted 15 March 2016.

<sup>xliii</sup> 12 May 1901, in Rubio and Waterston, *The PEI Years: 1901-11*, p. 17.

<sup>xliv</sup> R. W. Emerson, 'The Poet', in *Poems* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1904), p. 311. Montgomery quoted Emerson's lines in her journal (9 October 1907, Rubio and Waterston, *The PEI Years: 1901-11*, p. 174). *Emily Climbs*, p.11.

<sup>xlv</sup> Montgomery, *Anne of the Island* (New York: Aladdin, 2014, first published 1915), pp. 253-4.

<sup>xlvi</sup> W. C. Bryant, 'A Forest Hymn', in *The Poetical Works of William Cullen Bryant*, ed. F W. N. Bayley (London: Routledge, 1861), p. 75.

<sup>xlvii</sup> I. Gammel, 'Anne of Green Gables' in C. Mitchell and J. Reid-Walsh (eds.) *Girl Culture: An Encyclopedia*, vol 1 (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), p. 146.

<sup>xlviii</sup> F. P. Grove, *Over Prairie Trails* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2010), pp. 17, 22. Montgomery greatly admired this work. See Gammel, 'My Secret Garden', pp. 244-5.

<sup>xlix</sup> For helpful discussions of indigenous worldviews that connect these to ecocritical and ecotheological viewpoints, especially in relation to 'animism', and which reflect on colonial and postcolonial (mis)understandings of these views, see, for instance, P.

---

Stuckey, 'Being Known by a Birch Tree: Animist Refigurings of Western Epistemology', *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 4.3 (2010) 182-205 and A. Fisk, 'Appropriating, Romanticising and Reimagining: Pagan Engagement with Indigenous Animism' in K. Rountree (ed.), *Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism and Modern Paganism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, in press), mss version.

<sup>l</sup> Grove, p. 84. Cf Montgomery's comment that in Canada 'I couldn't have the background here that is ready to the British writer's hand. One has to have ghosts and old gods.' Cited Litster, p. 320.

<sup>li</sup> J. G. Whittier, 'To – ', in *The Complete Poetical Works of John Greenleaf Whittier* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1873), p. 162. For Montgomery's description of this as a favourite poem, see Lefebvre, *Reader*, I, p. 175.

<sup>lii</sup> M. S. Hogue, *The Tangled Bank: Towards An Ecotheological Ethics of Responsible Participation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2008), p. 226. Hogue's discussion of 'participation' is drawn from the Christian ethics of James Gustafson (pp. 222-8).

<sup>liii</sup> Holmes, p. 374. *Anne of Green Gables*, p. 315.

<sup>liv</sup> M. H. Rubio, 'L. M. Montgomery: Scottish-Presbyterian Agency in Canadian Culture' in I. Gammel and E. Epperly (eds.), *L. M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), pp. 89-105, p. 90.

<sup>lv</sup> *Anne of Avonlea*, pp. 235-6.

<sup>lvi</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>lvii</sup> Bauckham, p. 33. He discusses the eco-theological implications of this passage from Isaiah on p. 118.

<sup>lviii</sup> *Emily of New Moon*, p. 233.

---

<sup>lix</sup> Ibid., p. 234. The story of Haman is in Esther 7. On Emily's enlisting of Cassidy as an 'ally', and on the complex issues of land ownership and gender embedded in the incident of Lofty John's Bush, see the excellent discussion in Holmes, pp. 380-383.

<sup>lx</sup> *Emily's Quest* (London: Virago, 2013, first published 1927), pp. 183-4.

<sup>lxi</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>lxiii</sup> S. Bergmann, 'Where on Earth Does the Spirit "Take Place" Today? Considerations on Pneumatology in the Light of the Global Environmental Crisis' in Conradie, Bergmann, Deane-Drummond and Edwards (eds.), pp. 51-64, p. 59.

<sup>lxiii</sup> M. I. Wallace, 'The Wounded Spirit as the Basis for Hope in an Age of Radical Ecology', in D. T. Hessel and R. Radford Ruether (eds.), *Christianity and Ecology* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 51-72, p. 59.