

Bosom Friends

Lesbian Desire in L.M. Montgomery's Anne Books

“Oh Diana,” said Anne at last, clasping her hands and speaking almost in a whisper, “do you think—oh, do you think you can like me a little—enough to be my bosom friend?”
(Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* 87)

When their work was done and Gilbert was out of the way, they gave themselves over to shameless orgies of lovemaking and ecstasies of adoration.
(Montgomery, *Anne's House of Dreams* 208)

“I am not a Lesbian,” fifty-eight-year-old L.M. Montgomery wrote in her journal in response to an increasingly problematic relationship with Isobel,¹ a female schoolteacher in her late twenties (*Selected Journals* 8 Feb 1932). One might think that Montgomery protests too much, especially since she also, intriguingly, claims to understand the “horrible craving” of the lesbian “much better than [Isobel] understands it herself” (*Selected Journals* 24 June 1932). Yet Montgomery convincingly represents Isobel's relentless pursuit as pathological. The younger woman threatened suicide and professed undying love for the novelist: “I'll die without you. You've always shone like a golden star in my life . . .” (*Selected Journals* 8 Feb 1932). Montgomery was disturbed yet fascinated by Isobel's interest in her, labelling Isobel an “unconscious” lesbian (10 June 1932).

In *Anne of Windy Poplars* (1936), a novel published four years after these entries, Montgomery depicts a relationship that seems to draw on her own experience with Isobel. As I will discuss in detail later, Anne pursues a friendship with an unhappy spinster schoolteacher, Katherine Brooke. Katherine voices feelings for Anne that echo Isobel's for Montgomery: “I acknowledged to myself that you might just have come from some far-off star” (150). Similarly, Anne's frustration with Katherine mirrors Montgomery's exasperation with Isobel. While Anne exclaims, “Katherine

Brooke, whether you know it or not, what *you* want is a good spanking” (144), Montgomery wrote, “I would dearly have loved to have taken Miss Isobel across my knee and administered a sound and salutary spanking by way of giving her a lesson in elementary good manners, common sense and ordinary decency” (20 August 1932). Certainly, intense female friendships appeared frequently in novels for and by women at the time. Montgomery was patently aware that these friendships could suggest other possibilities, such as same-sex desire. Nevertheless, even after reading about lesbianism in a psychoanalytic study² and undergoing this troubling experience with Isobel, Montgomery maintained a focus on Anne’s love for girls and women in *Anne of Windy Poplars* and *Anne of Ingleside*. Thus, lesbian desire in Montgomery’s works is not an anachronistic issue, reflecting only our late twenty-first-century attitudes towards same-sex relationships; on the contrary, it arises directly from Montgomery’s fiction and journals.³

Anne’s friendship with Katherine is only one of many same-sex relationships that form the basis of the eight books in Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* series. From Diana, Marilla, and Miss Stacy to Miss Lavendar, Susan, and Rebecca Dew (to mention only a few examples), girls and women dominate the narratives. Anne’s relationships with girls and women are central to every book. Yet Montgomery faced a generic and social imperative to marry the female characters off. By constructing a world where women’s love for each other is a source of power and fulfilment, and then emphasizing the inevitability of marriage, Montgomery’s novels underscore the fact that, at the turn of the twentieth century, heterosexuality was compulsory. At the same time, by exposing the operations of compulsory heterosexuality, Montgomery’s *Anne* books subtly challenge the patriarchal traditions that intervene in women’s relationships with each other.

Contesting Patriarchy: Scholarly Consensus

Montgomery scholarship has largely proceeded on the assumption that Anne is “naturally” heterosexual, an assumption that allows for feminist interpretations which highlight the heroine’s empowerment. Critics such as Mary Rubio, Elizabeth Epperly, and Shirley Foster and Judy Simons agree that Montgomery criticizes or challenges her society, particularly its patriarchal structure. However, her challenge is couched in conventional terms. Rubio argues that Montgomery “embed[s] a countertext of rebellion” in her novels which nevertheless seem to “reinforce all the prevailing ideologies” (8). Montgomery manages this, in part, Rubio claims, through the lowbrow

literary form of domestic romance, through humour, and through narrative method and characterization. Similarly, Foster and Simons emphasize that through literary allusions and humour, Montgomery “challenge[s] codified established values” (154). Epperly emphasizes the subversive irony in *Anne of Green Gables* that is not carried through the rest of the series.

These critics acknowledge that, while Montgomery subtly challenges patriarchy in her fiction, she also follows generic conventions, such as those stipulating “that female heroines should be sexless, refined ‘ladies’ . . . who conformed to society’s expectations; . . . [and] that the ideal closure for a ‘good’ young girl’s story must be marriage” (Rubio 13). Thus, “Anne’s only sensible choice is to embrace her destiny, realize her love for Gilbert, and get married” (Epperly 69). T.D. MacLulich agrees that Montgomery’s heroines “meekly agree to marry the mate that Montgomery has created specifically for them” (466) because she “could not imagine an alternate way of ending a story” (471). Anne’s inevitable marriage may also yield a reading that is less empowering for the heroine if readers do not assume that she is heterosexual. For if the reader concludes that Anne’s love for women remains unfulfilled because she lives under a generic and social imperative to be heterosexual, then Anne capitulates to patriarchal pressures in return for acceptance by her community.

Some critics have pointed out that heterosexual love carries discomfort or ambiguity in Montgomery’s novels by comparing them to Kevin Sullivan’s 1985 television movie, *Anne of Green Gables*. Sullivan’s version of *Anne* emphasizes the budding heterosexual romance between Anne and Gilbert; his handling of their relationship highlights the extent to which Montgomery does not emphasize romance. Susan Drain suggests that Montgomery is “uncomfortable in handling romance” in contrast to Sullivan because Montgomery does not dwell on the supposedly blossoming love between Anne and Gilbert (Drain, “Too Much” 71). Temma Berg, in response to Sullivan’s movie version, notes that in the novel Anne seeks a friend, not a romantic partner, in Gilbert (“A Girl’s Reading” 127).

The conclusion that Montgomery’s novels subtly question heterosexuality is not new, although little has so far been published on the topic. In her article “My Secret Garden,” Irene Gammel argues that the “eroticized” and “passionate girl-girl friendships” in Montgomery’s Emily books provide the characters with transgressive power (42). These relationships, combined with nature and auto-eroticism as sources of energy and power, construct a female eros focused on health and well-being. However, Gammel shies away

from the conclusion that the friendships might be lesbian, even while she discusses the “female-centred eros” (59). While arguing that Montgomery advocates a “subversive eros,” her article in fact demonstrates the opposite: Emily’s acceptance into her community rests, in part, on her rejection of her same-sex desires in favour of heterosexual behaviour (53). Moreover, by suggesting that the Emily books expand the friendship motif established in *Anne of Green Gables*, Gammel seems to dismiss the potentially transgressive power of the expressions of same-sex love in the Anne books: it is mere friendship.

Marah Gubar argues that Montgomery’s novels indicate that she is aware of the lack of choice in the ending: marriage is, in fact, compulsory. Focusing on the Anne series, Gubar argues persuasively that Montgomery postpones heterosexual marriages in her Anne books in order to “make room for passionate relationships between women that prove far more romantic than traditional marriages” (47). Like Gammel, Gubar does not address same-sex eroticism directly, but her point is clear: Montgomery’s Anne novels focus on women’s relationships with each other to a degree that displaces and disrupts heterosexual conventions. The Anne books convey the message that “only a misguided fool would dismiss a potential prince simply because he’s a girl” (Gubar 65). However, as Gubar also notes, Montgomery can only postpone heterosexuality; she cannot evade it altogether.

Other scholars have made more direct connections between *Anne* and lesbian desire. Karen Dubinsky, a historian at Queen’s University, places *Anne of Green Gables* in the context of Boston marriages (“platonic” live-in relationships between women in nineteenth-century America).⁴ Linda Grant de Pauw, also a historian, invokes *Anne of Green Gables* when she defines lesbianism: “Some lesbians prefer sexual activity that is nongenital, the kind of kissing, hugging, holding hands, and sharing a bed once considered totally innocent and celebrated in such books as *Anne of Green Gables*, in which the heroine unselfconsciously seeks out a ‘bosom buddy’” (8). In a paper entitled “Is Anne of Green Gables a lesbian?” presented to a children’s literature conference in Nashville, Steven Bruhm concludes that indeed she is. In the memoir *No Previous Experience*, Elspeth Cameron describes the e-mail conversation she and her female best friend and lover had about Anne and Diana’s relationship, in which they pose the question “Do you think L.M.M. had any idea how erotic [Anne and Diana’s conversation] sounds?” (73). Whether Montgomery knew the erotic power of her language or not, the

relationships Anne has with girls and women in the eight novels are, at the very least, ambiguous in their treatment of passion.

In my own teaching and lecturing on the topic, audiences, readers, and students have responded with engaged interest to such arguments. But when I presented an early draft of this paper at Congress 2000 in Edmonton, the suggestion that the Anne books might contain expressions of lesbian desire prompted a public outcry and a media storm.⁵ The two-and-a-half weeks of sustained media interest in this research led to articles by two scholars, Cecily Devereux and Gavin White, responding to my initial draft argument. Devereux's article is concerned primarily with a historical analysis of what she terms "The 'Bosom Friends' Affair," concluding that the resultant debate over Anne's sexuality reveals what Canadian culture holds dear. White's article acknowledges that the friendships in the Anne books are extremely important but focuses almost exclusively on defending Anne (and Montgomery) against the charge of lesbianism. The anxiety my research has caused could be considered evidence of the very same compulsory heterosexuality that I argue is at work in these novels. The suggestion that Anne's desires might not be heterosexual is deeply troubling to many readers.

Lesbian Desires: Historical Context

Montgomery's novels span a crucial period in the history of sexuality, from the end of the nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Historians such as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Lillian Faderman have examined the love that flourished between women in the nineteenth century, both in Britain and the United States.⁶ Women in "romantic friendships" were devoted to each other in ways that would now be regarded as erotically charged: they wrote love letters to each other; they pledged undying love; they spent their lifetimes "in love" with each other, even when they married men; they slept together and caressed and fondled; some women even lived together their whole lives. According to these historians, middle-class society at the time did not consider this intensely homosocial behaviour problematic.

However, in the 1920s, for various reasons, including the new work of sexologists and women's emancipatory movements, mainstream culture began to view the love between women as threatening, pathological, and unacceptable. Smith-Rosenberg suggests that, prior to this time, in order to maintain separate spheres for males and females, middle-class families had discouraged young women's interest in men and, by extension, encouraged women's "homosocial ties" (74). Rosemary Auchmuty finds evidence of this

change in attitudes in Elsie J. Oxenham's girls' stories. She finds that "a very conscious love for women which in 1923 was fine and after 1928 became abnormal and unhealthy, represent[ed] a level of intimacy which was too threatening to be allowed to continue" (140). Faderman asserts that after 1920, British middle-class society perceived that "love between women, coupled with their emerging freedom, might conceivably bring about the overthrow of heterosexuality—which has meant not only sex between men and women but patriarchal culture, male dominance, and female subservience" (411).

Lisa L. Moore disputes Faderman's and Smith-Rosenberg's findings by pointing out that there was occasional disapprobation of close female friendships in the nineteenth century (8). Looking at the oppositional constructs of "the sapphist" and "the romantic friend," Moore shows that, from the eighteenth century onwards, women's intimacy with one another, whether in friendship or otherwise, has not been unproblematic. According to Moore, women's relationships with each other elicited a range of responses, from alarm to indifference. Rather than being encouraged (as Smith-Rosenberg argues), "intimacy between women formed a much more flexible category, one that could be recruited in the service of arguments from across the political spectrum" (Moore 145). Through her study of literature, Moore effectively shows that even before the 1920s, British middle-class society often did find women's love for women threatening. Similarly, Sheila Jeffreys cites evidence from Faderman's *The Scotch Verdict* that girls in British boarding schools in 1811 were gossiping, often maliciously, about lesbianism (27). While no one has conducted a full and detailed historical study of women's friendships in the Canadian context, it seems safe to assume that similarly complex attitudes prevailed in Canada.

Ultimately, as these studies underscore, the distinction between female friendship and lesbianism is exceedingly difficult to make. Surely the division between the "sapphist" and the "romantic friend" is an insignificant and socially constructed one, as Sheila Jeffreys points out in her article on lesbians in history, "Does It Matter If They Did It?" It is extremely difficult for modern scholars to determine whether women of the past who considered themselves romantic friends were in fact lesbians: the women could or would not document other dimensions to their relationships, or families suppressed or destroyed evidence (Lesbian History Group). In any case, the line between mere friendship and lesbian love is blurry at best. Regardless of the extent to which one might argue that genital contact is a defining feature of lesbianism, women can be in love with women for their entire lives

without experiencing sexual contact. Refraining from sexual contact with other women does not necessarily make a woman heterosexual. Similarly, women can have sexual encounters with women without defining themselves as lesbian. Nevertheless, there appears to be (at least in our own time) a need to label sexuality, perhaps as a response to sustained threats to patriarchal domination. As Jonathan Katz explains, “At this [the twentieth] century’s end hetero and homo have settled into two fixed, concrete objects of everyday postmodern life” (170).

Through her framework of the “lesbian continuum,” Adrienne Rich believes that feminist analysis should expose compulsory heterosexuality, or the extent to which heterosexuality is a rigidly enforced ideology rather than a sexual preference or choice. Rich suggests that all women occupy positions on a lesbian continuum which expresses “a range—through each woman’s life and throughout history—of women-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman” (239). Rich’s continuum disrupts the simplistic binary opposition between gay and straight. Identifying Anne’s desires for her female friends as lesbian highlights the extent to which Anne is assimilated into patriarchal culture when she gets engaged to and marries Gilbert. More importantly, reading for Anne’s lesbian desires exposes the possibilities for same-sex desire and the workings of compulsory heterosexuality in Montgomery’s fiction.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis’s analysis of conventions of the nineteenth-century domestic novel helps explain the generic constraints Montgomery faced—constraints that were, in a sense, enforcement mechanisms for compulsory heterosexuality. DuPlessis suggests that a “dialectic between love and quest” creates tension in nineteenth-century women’s novels, a tension usually resolved in favour of love. In DuPlessis’s view, narrative structure operates to transmit ideology: “As a narrative pattern, the romance plot muffles the main female character, represses quest, valorizes heterosexual as opposed to homosexual ties, incorporates individuals within couples as a sign of their personal and narrative success” (5). In order to be successful—to survive socially and generically—a character needs to embrace heterosexuality. Anne cannot marry Diana. Acceptance comes at a cost, DuPlessis would point out, as Anne’s fulfillment is relinquished for her narrative survival: “Once upon a time, the end, the rightful end, of women in novels was social—successful courtship, marriage—or judgemental of her sexual and social failure—death” (1). Anne survives and achieves acceptance by submitting to

compulsory heterosexuality. Yet, even though Anne and her friends ultimately do embrace heterosexuality, Montgomery's novels establish women's intense homosocial relationships as the central concern. Anne manages to achieve acceptance by doing her duty as a heterosexual woman, yet she also succeeds in creating intensely passionate relationships with her female friends. These friendships present a quiet challenge to traditional patriarchy.

Montgomery's Alternatives to Compulsory Heterosexuality

Discussing Anne's desires in the context of Rich's lesbian continuum emphasizes the social construction of both heterosexuality and lesbianism. Calling Anne's sexuality into question, as some readers might phrase it, destabilizes the naturalness of heterosexuality. Heterosexuality is perceived as biologically derived and natural in order to justify the gender roles that perpetuate patriarchy. While Montgomery's novels seem to maintain patriarchal conventions, they also reveal the pressures of compulsory heterosexuality. Her Anne novels present an array of creative alternatives to traditional, patriarchal family relationships. First, they establish from the outset that a heterosexual family is not the only option. Why are Marilla and Matthew siblings? The story would not have changed had the two been a married, childless couple. By having siblings rather than a married couple adopt a child, *Anne of Green Gables* makes clear that any grouping of individuals may constitute a family and that sexuality need not be the defining feature.

Women living on their own present another alternative to heterosexuality. As Gubar rather optimistically suggests, "the Anne series dramatizes the pleasures of single life . . . by rewriting and even eroticizing the figure of the old maid" (50). The eight Anne books begin and end with the stories of maiden mothers, Marilla and Rilla: these two maternal virgins "frame and extend the story of the redhead destined for Gilbert and submerged in the genteel marriage demanded by plot conventions" (Huse 137). Marilla and Rilla manage to have a complete life without heterosexual coupling—although, in Rilla's case, this lasts only for a time. While a "maiden" mother is not necessarily lesbian, neither is she necessarily heterosexual. Montgomery's novels suggest that a woman does not have to be heterosexually active to raise a child. Many of Anne's friends and cherished role models are single women, living fulfilling lives outside of heterosexual pairings: for example, Miss Stacy, Miss Josephine Barry, Miss Cornelia, Miss Katherine Brooke, and Rebecca Dew. Marilla and Rachel Lynde live together after Rachel's husband's death. This arrangement, which allows Anne to further her university

education, suggests the empowering possibilities that arise when women bond together. Moreover, the later Anne novels abound with horrific stories of marital abuse and domestic violence, indicating not only that heterosexual marriage produces a different reality from that promised by the romantic ideal but also that perhaps it is best avoided.⁷ Needless to say, this motif of abuse undermines the matchmaking, courtship, and wedding plots that structure the novels.

Not only can women live without heterosexual romance in Montgomery's Anne books; they can also turn to each other for love and support, as Marilla and Rachel do. Critics have often noted that women dominate the world of Avonlea, and they have used terms such as "female utopia" to describe this world (as, for example, Eve Kornfeld and Susan Jackson do). In this respect, the Anne novels resemble other types of "girls' stories": "in contrast to the domestic and heterosexual tenor of the times, they [the school girls] inhabited a female world. All authority figures as well as colleagues and comrades were women" (Auchmuty 126). From Marilla and Mrs. Lynde to Mrs. Allan and Miss Stacy, female characters provide much of the strength in the Anne books: "in many ways, the town of Avonlea seems to be a town of Amazons" (Berg, "A Girl's Reading" 127). Moreover, Berg argues that Montgomery successfully represses her personal misgivings about female friendships in *Anne of Green Gables* by presenting a "perfect friendship" between Anne and Diana (Berg, "Sisterhood" 39).

Nonetheless, in certain ways the Anne books still insist that the alternatives to heterosexual romance are not particularly attractive. The single life, while an option, is simply not appealing. Marilla is a dry old maid. Wealthy Miss Barry laments her loneliness when Diana and Anne leave. Miss Brooke is devastatingly lonely. Others, such as Susan and Rebecca Dew, are servants and the objects of affectionate derision. Montgomery postpones Anne's wedding until book five, but, ultimately, Anne must marry or become a laughable old maid. By, on the one hand, affirming the power and fulfilment derived from women's love for each other, and then, on the other, emphasizing the inevitability of marriage, Montgomery's novels underscore the fact that, at the turn of the twentieth century, heterosexuality was indeed compulsory.

Anne and Her Friends

Arguably, Anne's most intense female friendships are with Diana Barry, Katherine Brooke, and Leslie Moore. While Anne's love for Diana begins in adolescence, her relationships with the other two women occur when all are

adults. Anne is twenty-one when she meets Katherine and twenty-four when she first sees Leslie. Her love for girls and women cannot be dismissed as just a passing phase of childhood. Moreover, in depicting these friendships, Montgomery's texts follow a repeated formula, as if to emphasize the heteronormative script and the apparent impossibility of straying from it. First, Anne displays an unbearable longing or desire for her friend. Then, some obstacle obscures the path of their love. The obstacle is finally overcome, only to have compulsory heterosexuality intervene.

Marrying Diana

The idyllic adolescent love shared by Anne and Diana and sustained through their adulthood highlights how inescapable heterosexuality is because, despite their love, they cannot ultimately be together. Anne can only express her intense love for Diana through the heterosexual paradigm of marriage. After the girls are forced to part company, they exchange love letters that borrow heavily from the discourse of courtship and marriage. Diana writes, "I love you as much as ever," and confesses that she tells "all her secrets" to Anne. Anne responds in kind and signs off with "Yours until death us do part," adding "I shall sleep with your letter under my pillow tonight" as a postscript (135). The marriage vow recurs when Diana gives Anne a card with the following inscription:

If you love me as I love you
Nothing but death can part us two. (146)

Of course, none of this language is inherently heterosexual, but it is the language that readers associate with adult romantic love rather than girlhood affections. The discourse of heterosexual romantic love permeates the text even while it represents homosexual desire. After Anne, mistakenly offering Diana red currant wine instead of raspberry cordial, gets her friend drunk, Diana's mother refuses to let her daughter associate with Anne. Anne bids farewell to Diana in a highly romantic manner: "Will you promise faithfully never to forget me, the friend of your youth, no matter what dearer friends may caress thee?" (131). She takes a lock of Diana's hair as a keepsake. Moreover, Anne claims to love Diana with "an *inextinguishable* love" (137; italics in original) and weeps with bitterness over the thought that Diana will marry someday, as she explains to Marilla: "I love Diana so, Marilla, I cannot live without her. But I know very well when we grow up that Diana will get married and go away and leave me" (119). That she tells her grief to

Marilla, a spinster living with her silent brother, highlights Anne's possible lonely future without Diana. The homoeroticism emerges again when Diana betrays jealousy of Anne's friend at Queen's: "Josie said you were *infatuated* with her" (290; italics in original). To reassure Diana, Anne says, "I feel as if it were joy enough to sit here and look at you" (290). The sensuous language of courtship establishes Anne as suitor to Diana.

The obstacles to their love are varied but fairly minor. The separation occasioned by the red currant wine incident foreshadows their repeated later separations and creates an urgency to their vows of love. Anne and Diana's repeated partings provide the occasions for their romantic exchanges, as if the fact of their being unable to connect physically allows them to pledge their eternal love for one another. Their love is postponed until it is finally redirected to acceptable heterosexuality. Diana pairs up with the boring Fred Wright, and Anne finally consents to marry Gilbert whom she had earlier rejected because she did not love him (*Anne of the Island* 143). However, almost every Anne book begins with Diana: *Anne of the Island* begins with both girls regretting the impending change as Anne prepares to leave for university; *Anne's House of Dreams* begins with Diana helping Anne get married; *Anne of Ingleside* begins with Anne and Diana, now older, reminiscing about their childhood love. They regret the passing of time because it reveals their intimate love, "their old unforgotten love burning in their hearts," which has necessarily been neglected for their domestic duties (*Anne of Ingleside* 13). When in *Ingleside* Anne mentions how lovely their friendship has been, Diana can hardly express herself: "Yes . . . and we've always . . . I mean . . . I never could say things like you, Anne . . . but we have kept our old 'solemn vow and promise,' haven't we?" (*Anne of Ingleside* 12). The nostalgic longing that colours the women's adult relationship exposes how sad they are about losing intimacy.

Spanking Katherine

While narrative and social conventions prevent Montgomery from allowing Anne to maintain a primary love relationship with Diana, she develops another same-sex relationship in its place. Katherine Brooke succeeds Diana in *Anne of Windy Poplars*. By donning an old pair of Diana's snow shoes when she visits Green Gables, Katherine literally and metaphorically fills Diana's shoes, as Diana is now side-tracked by domestic, wifely, and motherly concerns: "Katherine was with [Anne] in place of Diana" (160). Described as having "almost a man's voice," Katherine, the single school

marm in Summerside, is the embodiment of the anti-feminine ideal (29). Not only does she have an unattractive personality, but her looks are “dark and swarthy,” and she is not well-dressed (29). In a letter to Gilbert, Anne still manages to compliment the unhappy woman, noting the shape of her hands, ears, eyes, and mouth. It is noteworthy that Katherine’s physicality warrants such attention from Anne. Moreover, Anne and Katherine’s relationship is informed by a sado-masochism. Katherine is hostile and unpredictable toward Anne. Anne writes to Gilbert: “Every time I pass her on the stairs I feel that she is thinking horrid things about me” (29). However, Anne wins the tyrant over, although one must wonder why she continues to try in the face of Katherine’s hostility. After proposing that Katherine come to Green Gables for Christmas and receiving an offensive response, Anne loses her temper: “Katherine Brooke, whether you know it or not, what *you* want is a good spanking” (144). Katherine’s hostility and anger ultimately dissipate when Anne refuses to play the masochist and, instead, threatens to adopt a sadistic role. Patricia Smith’s concept of lesbian panic might help to explain the violence, hatred, and fear that characterize the relationship between these two women:

In terms of narrative, lesbian panic is, quite simply, the disruptive action or reaction that occurs when a character . . . is either unable or unwilling to confront or reveal her own lesbianism or lesbian desire. Typically, a female character, fearing discovery of her covert or unarticulated lesbian desires—whether by the object of her desires, by other characters, or even by herself— . . . lashes out directly or indirectly at another woman, resulting in emotional or physical harm to herself or others. (2)⁸

If this is what motivates Katherine’s hostility and Anne’s outburst, it abates after Katherine confesses to hating Anne. She concludes by admitting that “In spite of my hatred there were times when I acknowledged to myself that you might just have come from some far-off star” (150). Katherine’s hostility cloaks a rather traditionally romantic view of Anne as celestial being.

After Anne breaks through to Katherine, a love affair blooms that leaves Gilbert in the shadows. Anne and Katherine visit Green Gables for Christmas, and the narrative focuses on their growing friendship. One might think that Anne would visit with her fiancé since she has spent so much time away from him, yet the narrative hardly mentions Gilbert. Instead, Anne and Katherine spend all their time together. While they snow-shoe, they remain silent so as not to spoil “something beautiful. But Anne had never felt so near Katherine Brooke before. By some magic of its own the winter might have brought them together . . . *almost* together but not quite” (148; italics

in original). It is not quite clear what the narrator means here by “almost together,” but one must suppose that some intangible emotion stands in the way of their connection as *Kindred Spirits*, or that a deeper connection of another kind is out of the question. Moreover, after Katherine confesses at length to having hated Anne in the past because, in Katherine’s misperceptions, Anne’s life was easy, they have a more comfortable bond: “Anne no longer felt afraid of her” (149).

With Anne’s encouragement, Katherine quits teaching, which she hates; she goes to Redmond College and then becomes a secretary to a member of Parliament, thereby fulfilling her dream of travelling. This new position, however, does not fulfill all of her dreams, for Katherine, who claims to “hate men” (149), now finds herself subservient to a man. “I wish I could tell you what you’ve brought into my life,” she writes to Anne (255), indicating something that remains unspoken or unspeakable. Much of their friendship remains outside of language, in a realm “where souls communed with each other in some medium that needed nothing so crude as words” (148). References to the unspoken and unwritten indicate that more is going on than the narrative can convey. However, Katherine and Anne’s love does not progress: Katherine leaves to work for a man, and Anne finally marries Gilbert.

Desiring Leslie⁹

Anne’s passion for Leslie Moore indicates clearly that compulsory heterosexuality might not be an overwhelming obstacle to homosexual love. Twenty-four pages into *Anne’s House of Dreams*, the newly married Anne is on her way to her new house and her wedding night. Before even reaching the house and consummating her marriage, Anne sees the love of her life on the road, and it is not Gilbert or Diana or Katherine. Leslie Moore, above everyone else, is the object of Anne’s desire:

I am your friend and you are mine, for always. . . . Such a friend as I never had before. I have had many dear and beloved friends—but there is something in you, Leslie, that I never found in anyone else. You have more to offer me in that rich nature of yours, and I have more to give you than I had in my careless girlhood. We are both women—and friends forever. (129)

Leslie’s beauty makes Anne “gasp” and her eyes “ache” (24, 149). Upon meeting Leslie, who speaks to Anne with an “odd passion” (66), Anne is surprised to discover she is married, as “there seemed nothing of the wife about her” (64), a comment that remains unexplained. Leslie is a barely controlled and inviting erotic being: at a small get-together with neighbours,

she dances with “wild, sweet abandon” as if the music has “entered into and possessed her” (100). Furthermore, “all the innate richness and colour and charm of her nature seemed to have broken loose and overflowed in crimson cheek and glowing eye and grace of motion” (100). After witnessing this sensual overflow, Anne confesses her feelings to Captain Jim: “I don’t know why I can’t get closer to her. . . . I like her so much—I admire her so much—I want to take her right into my heart and creep right into hers. But I can never get across the barrier” (103). Leslie Moore dominates *Anne’s House of Dreams*. The story is hers, not even Anne’s and certainly not Gilbert’s. Gilbert, as usual, recedes quietly into the background.

Anne desires Leslie, yet, like Katherine, Leslie provides her own obstacle to this love. From the first moment she lays eyes on Anne, Leslie displays a “veiled hint of hostility” (24). Like Katherine, Leslie eventually admits that the barrier was her hatred of Anne. She admits to hating Anne one minute and craving her friendship the next: “then you came dancing along the cove like a glad, light-hearted child. I—I hated you more than I’ve ever done since. And yet I craved your friendship” (126). She explains her jealousy:

I used to watch you from my window—I could see you and your husband strolling about your garden in the evening. . . . And it hurt me. And yet in another way I wanted to go over. . . . I could have liked you and found in you what I’ve never had before in my life—an intimate, real friend of my own age. (125)

Leslie’s jealousy is ostensibly because of her unhappy marriage, and yet it could also be read as jealousy because of her desire for Anne. A tragic figure, Leslie has been trapped into a marriage with an insensible invalid who was once an abusive husband. But the marriage is ultimately revealed to be a case of mistaken identity: Leslie discovers that she has been tending her dead husband’s cousin, so she is suddenly a single woman again. Shortly after this discovery, the two women admire Anne’s new-born child together. In this passage, not only is the child not directly mentioned, but the language is also erotically suggestive: “When their work was done and *Gilbert was out of the way*, they gave themselves over to shameless orgies of lovemaking and ecstasies of adoration” (208; emphasis added). In 1922, these words might not have borne the sexual connotations they do today, but it does seem telling that the patriarch, Gilbert, needs to be removed for the lovemaking to occur. When Owen Ford, the writer in love with Leslie, returns to claim her now that she is single, he literally interrupts the lovemaking of Anne and Leslie. Once again, women’s love is overcome by patriarchal intervention, for the novel concludes with Leslie’s marriage.

In the case of Anne's relationships with Diana, Katherine, and Leslie, love is delayed or complicated, suggesting that their feelings are not quite as straightforward as "romantic friendships." Marriage displaces the love between Diana and Anne because the married Diana has no time for Anne. Marriage displaces the love between Katherine and Anne because Anne marries and Katherine serves as a travelling secretary for a man. Marriage displaces the love between Anne and Leslie because Leslie marries Owen Ford. Yet throughout, Anne consistently establishes intense relationships with women. Thus, even as she achieves acceptance in her community by marrying and ultimately producing children, Anne manages, in matters of sexuality as in everything else, to disturb complacent attitudes.

For my father, Karl Alexander Robinson (1933–2002).

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NOTES

- 1 Isobel is identified only by her first name in the journals, presumably in order to protect her privacy and that of her family. The editors of the journals offer only this explanation: "For legal reasons, we have excised one surname" (xxix). This decision to hide Isobel's identity ultimately accepts and reinscribes the fear of homosexuality. In a recent interview about the forthcoming fifth volume of Montgomery's journals, co-editor Mary Rubio said that "any concerns that she or the heirs have held back on or covered up salacious details in the Montgomery story will be resoundingly allayed" with the fifth volume and Rubio's biography of Montgomery. Isobel's real name will finally be released because she died in the past five years. When asked if Montgomery became a lesbian in the final years of her life, Rubio responded adamantly "absolutely not" (Adams R1).
- 2 Montgomery claims to have read "André Thedon's" *Psychoanalysis and Love*, particularly the chapter on "Unconscious Homo-sexualism," from which she diagnoses Isobel as Lesbian (*Selected Journals* 2 July 1932). The author is actually André Tridon—Montgomery made an error in her journal—and the book was published in 1922.
- 3 Of course, Montgomery's account of her fractious relationship with Isobel exposes her attitudes towards overt homosexuality. But the journals also reveal that Montgomery's dominant emotional relationships were with women, the most significant being Frede Campbell. While a more thorough examination of Montgomery's relationships with women is beyond the scope of this article, her account of Isobel's infatuation and of her own devotion to Frede suggest that a discussion of lesbian desire in Montgomery's fiction is not misplaced.
- 4 This discussion occurs in Dubinsky's class on gender and North American history. Similarly, Professor Maggie Berg, who teaches *Anne* in her course on myths of femininity at Queen's University, argues for a lesbian reading of the novel.
- 5 Among the news stories that appeared were the following: "Does lesbianism underlie Anne of Green Gables?" *Globe and Mail* (31 May/2000): A1, A5; "'Outrageously sexual' Anne was a lesbian, scholar insists" *Ottawa Citizen* (25 May/2000): A3; "Anne a lesbian?"

- 'Poppycock!'" *Ottawa Citizen* (26 May/2000): A7; "Did our Anne of Green Gables nurture gay fantasies?" *Edmonton Journal* (26 May/2000): A3; "Lesbian of Green Gables? Professor says heroine had longings for women" *National Post* (31 May/2000): B4. Articles also appeared on many websites, such as CBC and CNN, as well as in American publications, such as the *Boston Globe*. Japanese media contacted me, and the story appeared on a Swedish website, so this unexpected phenomenon had an international scope. A more detailed examination of the response to my research is beyond the compass of this paper.
- 6 Both Faderman and Smith-Rosenberg have been criticized for their examinations of women's friendships. See Moore (8–10) for a discussion of both historians; see also Jeffreys for a discussion of Faderman's book.
- 7 For example, *Anne of Ingleside*, with its focus on the marital discord between Anne and Gilbert, has an undercurrent of stories of abusive husbands, such as the tyrannical Peter Kirk (220). Similarly, Miss Cornelia of *Anne's House of Dreams* offers a litany of men who abuse their wives: Fred Procter (44), Jennie Dean's husband (48), Billy Booth (113), and even Horace Baxter (91), to name some examples.
- 8 Smith's argument might be seen to suggest that anger and abuse result from desire. Taken further, this reading might justify male violence against women as derived from unacknowledged or repressed love. I do not agree with this position. My argument here is rather that Katherine's and Leslie's conflicted responses to Anne—their anger and their fascination—suggest feelings more complicated than friendship. The conflict communicates to the reader that more is going on than is readily apparent.
- 9 I have chosen to discuss the books as they tell Anne's story rather than in the order in which they were written. It is perhaps telling that the most intensely erotic relationship—that with Leslie—was written in 1922, whereas the more conflicted one—with Katherine—appears in 1936.

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