

*A Maud of Her Own: Re-visioning L.M. Montgomery's "Western Eden" in Melanie Fishbane's
Historical Fiction*

by

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Table of Contents

Statement / 1

Acknowledgements / 2

Abstract / 4

Preface / 5

Introduction: The Problem of the Past as a “Foreign Country” / 6

Chapter 1: Key Terms and Theories: Intersections of Historical Fiction, Revisionism and
Children’s Literature / 9

Chapter 2: Montgomery’s Western World: “A Western Eden” and “Tannis of the Flats” / 15

Chapter 3: A *Maud* of Her Own: Melanie Fishbane’s Revisionist Representation of Indigenous
Peoples / 24

Conclusion / 34

Works Cited / 36

Abstract

This major research paper considers the connection between the genre of historical fiction and the complex dynamics of revisionist history in Melanie Fishbane's young adult novel *Maud: A Novel Inspired by the Life of L.M. Montgomery* (2017). More specifically, this study critically examines how Fishbane appropriates L.M. Montgomery's Western Canadian writings for her own purposes to update complex social realities and sensibilities in her historical novel. Because Montgomery's personal and fictional writings reveal a deeply conflicted and contradictory ideological stance on race issues, particularly where Indigenous peoples are concerned, which may frustrate or alienate 21st century mass readership, Fishbane opted to make her character, Maud, more sympathetic towards the plight of the Indigenous peoples in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan; this revisionist approach, I argue, has potential to gloss over the real Montgomery's more problematic and more heteroglossic representations on race. This study's findings indicate that the revisionist nature of historical fiction, moulded by the new context in which it is written, influences the way that texts and historical figures, like L.M. Montgomery are re-imagined and re-written.

Preface

I have long been interested in the genre of historical fiction as it was the gateway for me to further studies in history as an adult. I have also harboured a long-time interest in L. M. Montgomery's work whose legacy as an author continues to have impact on Canadian culture. Having grown up in the Norval, Ontario, area, I became involved as a Digital Marketing Chair in the initiative to purchase the Norval Manse that Montgomery lived in with her family from 1926-1935, and transform it into a Museum and Literary Arts Centre; a first milestone was achieved with the purchase of the Manse in 2017. As both a Montgomery enthusiast and scholar, I hope to offer an analytical perspective on the merging of the historical and the literary through historical fiction, and its role in the studies of the literature and culture of young people, in general, and L.M. Montgomery studies, specifically. It is my hope that this major research paper will spark a conversation about how beloved historical figures, such as L.M. Montgomery, are reconstructed in historical fiction and how these reconstructions impact our understanding of their attitudes and ideologies. Critical engagement with the nuances of historical and cultural context will illuminate the forces that work together to shape historical writings and re-writings.

Introduction: The Problem of the Past as a “Foreign Country”

“The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there” (Hartley 1). This opening sentence from British novelist L.P. Hartley’s 1953 historical novel *The Go-Between* has become the mantra of many historians in the decades following its publication. The author’s fascination with the past, or at least, the past he imagines, reflects his desire to understand *why* “they do things differently there.” More generally, what are the social and cultural forces that make the past a “foreign country,” and what is it about the past that makes it different from today and tomorrow? In fact, the very concept of history as a “foreign country” is a distinctly colonial interpretation where the past is exoticized. Indeed, the historical novel was born out of the contentious relationship between the literary and the historical. Literary criticism, notably formalist criticism, typically confines itself within the study of literary representation, but uses historical context for additional insight. Meanwhile, the methodologies of historical criticism aim to stay close to evidence and historically documented “facts,” which would, at first, appear to be at odds with fiction. In contrast, authors of historical fiction engage with both processes to create a story and, often, this fictional reconstruction allows them to explore the all-important “why” for historical figures and events.

In her debut young adult novel *Maud: A Novel Inspired by the Life of L.M. Montgomery* (2017), Fishbane provides an afterword in which she identifies her novel’s genre as historical fiction and indicates that the research and writing process took a total of five years to complete (“In Gratitude” 382). The challenge for Fishbane was to navigate complex and sometimes even contradictory primary sources, such as Montgomery’s journals, which Montgomery herself considered as a literary genre and rewrote multiple times during her lifetime; and her 1917 autobiography, *The Alpine Path*, which included additionally edited excerpts from her journals.

Maud focusses on Montgomery's teen years from age 15 to 17, including her schoolhouse dramas, romantic entanglements, her trip to Western Canada, her overbearing stepmother, and her relentless determination to become a successful writer. In this, Fishbane does not always take Montgomery at her word, but takes fictional liberties of her own in reimagining Montgomery's life to create "Maud," the character. Specifically, as we shall see, Fishbane uses her character, Maud, to re-write Montgomery's attitudes and ideologies towards the Indigenous peoples, adapting Maud's values to the sensibilities of a 21st century mainstream readership, thereby glossing over Montgomery's racist tone in some of her Western writings. Indeed, Fishbane intentionally uses her fictional medium to revise and explore Indigenous issues in somewhat of a postcolonial spirit for young readers. In the afterward, she shares that it was important for her to "show what was happening with the Métis and Cree Nation peoples (*Nehiyawak*) while also being authentic to Maud's story" ("More About Maud" 371). In general, these are laudable goals, and as we shall see, Fishbane uses historical fiction creatively to fill some gaps left by Montgomery's fiction and journals. At the same time, she also implements concrete transformations that create significant tension with Montgomery's texts.

Chapter One provides a literature review of the scholarship dedicated to the historical novel as a genre, providing definitions of key terms with particular awareness to the literary parameters of children's literature, while also considering the genre's recent intersections with postmodernism and postcolonialism. Because Montgomery herself was influenced by the historical novel *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) by American writer James Fenimore Cooper, Chapter Two examines this text alongside Montgomery's journal account of her visit to Western Canada; this chapter also studies her early fiction and essay writings inspired by the Canadian West in order to reveal her values and biases that are also reflective of her own ethnic and class

background, as well as her region, country, and era. Chapter Three studies how Fishbane interprets these sources and re-writes Montgomery's ideology; in this I argue that Fishbane significantly tones down Montgomery's ethnic and racial biases by adding a Métis voice to make the author palatable to a 21st century youth readership. This discussion is fueled by several relevant research questions: What narrative techniques does Fishbane use to inform the reader that the real Montgomery was not racially tolerant while her character, Maud, is? To what extent does she reveal or obscure Montgomery's blind spots with respect to Indigenous issues? Using theories of children's literature and historical fiction as my framework, this paper examines how Fishbane's historical fiction *Maud* presents revisionist history, specifically in terms of the Indigenous and Métis communities. In turn, I suggest that such revisionism has the potential to both mislead (and obscure) and teach (and enlighten) young readers about Montgomery's complex cultural ideologies. Ultimately, I hope to illuminate the relationship between historical fiction, revisionist history, and young adult audiences to reveal tensions, paradoxes and constructions of historical figures and national identities.

Chapter 1: Key Terms and Theories: Intersections of Historical Fiction, Revisionism and Children's Literature

Hungarian literary historian and philosopher George Lukacs was the first to examine the historical novel critically in his influential book *The Historical Novel* published in Russian in 1937 and translated into English in 1955. Significantly, Lukacs felt that historical novels were topical because of their potential to expand anti-fascist literature (17). He declares in his foreword that the historical novel still suffers from its association with bourgeois decadence and the only way to dispel this association is to examine historical consciousness through the historical novel (17). According to Lukacs, “the historical novel arose at the beginning of the nineteenth century at about the of Napoleon’s collapse” (19). He argues that medieval adaptations of classical history or myth can be viewed as precursors to the historical novel but that the seventeenth and eighteenth-century historical novels are historical solely in terms of their external choice of theme and costume. These novels, in Lukacs’ view, do not represent the historical, but rather, represent nothing more than the “writer’s own day” (19). In other words, these writers did not have sufficient historical consciousness, and thus, by default, they projected their own contemporary attitudes onto the past.

In the nineteenth century, authors like Sir Walter Scott, Honoré de Balzac and Leo Tolstoy set the stage for the rise of historical realism for authors. Indeed, there are several social, political, economic and ideological factors that contributed to the rise of the historical novel. Interestingly, Lukacs cautions writers of the genre against modernization, which he feels replaces the historical in most instances: “the historical novel of present day humanists... has not yet produced a concrete prehistory of the present, merely the historical reflections of present-day problems in history, an *abstract* of prehistory of *problems* pre-occupying the present” (296).

Today, Lukacs's literary framework for the historical novel serves most scholars—including myself in this study, as we shall see below—as a reference point when examining the intersection between history and literature.

In her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988), Linda Hutcheon refers to Lukacs's definition of the historical novel as a precursor to historiographic metafiction, which “plays upon the truth and lies of the historical record” (114). The latter is a self-aware and self-reflexive genre where the narrator addresses the reader and indicates its own construction and reconstruction. These narrators can be, at times, unreliable, prompting readers to question their authority and authenticity which leads them to question the authenticity of the past itself. Historiographic metafiction, as an extension of the historical novel, is inextricably linked to postmodernism. Postmodern fiction, according to Hutcheon, does not aspire to tell the truth, but rather it questions “*whose* truth gets told” (123). Therefore, postmodernism, which can be loosely characterized by the “capitalist dissolution of bourgeois hegemony” and the “development of mass culture,” sets the stage for historiographic metafiction to flourish (6). The process of re-writing or re-presenting the past in fiction and history opens the past up to the present and prevents it from being “conclusive and teleological” (110). Indeed, the ideological paradoxes inherent in postmodernism are also inherent in historiographic metafiction: “it installs totalizing order, only to contest it, by its radical provisionality, intertextuality, and often, fragmentation” (115).

Consequently, historiographic metafiction is also connected to the rise of New Journalism and the “non-fictional” novel in the 1960s. Specifically in America, there was a growing distrust of the “facts” presented by the government, prompting citizens to turn to alternative sources for information. According to Hutcheon, this desire for journalists to uncover the “Truth” led to an

“overtly personal and provisional journalism” which was “autobiographical in impulse and performative in impact” (115). Therefore, postmodern ideology and its narrative impact has influenced the reconstruction of fiction and non-fiction writing, where, as Hutcheon astutely observes: “facts are not given but are constructed by the kinds of questions we ask of events” (123). Thus, historiographic metafiction, in a postmodern context, gestures towards the implications of re-writing history and requires readers to “make meaning” to reveal the paradoxical and constructed nature of meaning itself (Hutcheon 112).

Though Hutcheon makes a clear distinction between historiographic metafiction, which is self-conscious, and historical fiction, which is more of a straightforward narration of the past, there are clear connections between the two. In many ways, historiographic metafiction informs the way that historical fiction continues to evolve. Authors of 21st century historical fiction are painfully aware of the tension between fact and fiction and, increasingly, they have begun to devise ways to indicate to their reader their inauthenticity through paratextual means. As explored by Jerome de Groot in *The Historical Novel* (2010), authors of 20th and 21st century historical fiction often include “Author’s Notes,” which serves to legitimize their historical research while simultaneously delegitimizing the factual nature of their story. These notes often include references, resources, epilogues, and a statement that acknowledges their work is a fictionalized account of past events and/or people (de Groot 182). Thus, historical fiction borrows tools from postmodern historiographic metafiction, such as style, form, and narration, to appeal to a popular audience. However, de Groot does not necessarily agree with Hutcheon’s clear distinction between historiographic metafiction and historical fiction. He posits that “the techniques of historical fiction *necessarily* imply a form that is self-conscious, complex and questioning” (100).

In de Groot's view, historical novelists operate within "the gaps of history," where the "insubstantiality of past events" allows writers to "introduce their version of events" (182). Indeed, as de Groot suggests, historical fiction challenges and subverts history by interrogating "fixed ideas of selfhood, historical progression and objectivity," a characteristic that was born out of, and is shared by, postmodern fiction (139). He contends that "revisionist history" can reclaim the past on behalf of previously marginalized voices (140). This approach, while influenced by postmodernism, is also postcolonial. Re-writing history from a postcolonial perspective can be an empowering process, where writing leaves room for political contestation. Thus, historical fiction can advocate ideological positions for a variety of social and political purposes and, most noticeably, in the construction and deconstruction of national identity.

This concept is explored in a Canadian context by Herb Wyile in *Speculative Fictions: Contemporary Canadian Novelists and the Writing of History* (2002). Wyile argues that historical fiction sprung from a crisis in historiography, where marginalized groups began to add their voice to disrupt the previously unified, singular, male Euro-centric history. He further posits that contemporary historical fiction contributes to an investigative process of historical representation and its role in the social, political, cultural and national discourse. Wyile observes that "contemporary Canadian novelists are much less inclined to construct patriotic narratives of the building of a nation and of a unitary Canadian character than to dramatize exploitation, appropriation, and exclusion that such narratives of nation have often served to efface" (7). Indeed, 20th and 21st-century Canadian historical fiction represents experimentation with form and content, subverting official history as well as the history presented in early versions of the historical novel, or in other words, historical fiction uses revisionist history to reclaim marginalized identities.

That said, historical fiction, while challenging previous ideologies, also paradoxically shapes new ideologies in their place. Recently, scholars have begun to explore the impact of historical fiction and its pedagogical impact on young readers of the genre. As de Groot writes in reference to children's (predominantly male children's) games: "tales from history were educative, exemplary and something to be imitated to aid the development of the young mind (88). For example, most historical stories for children in the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century upheld the values of empire and colonialism as tools that educated and entertained the future citizens of the nation. Once the process of decolonization began in the 1950s and 1960s, there was a marked shift in literature towards the postcolonial, a process that filtered down to into children's literature.

Clare Bradford in *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children's Literature* (2007) observes that children's texts often rehearse and reinvolve colonialism as most of children's literature, even postcolonial literature, continues to be written from a Euro-centric perspective. Stories featuring Indigenous characters are written by, and filtered through, Western culture, thus highlighting issues of representation in authorship. According to Bradford, liberal humanist modes of thought continue to dominate children's literature, which often emphasizes individuals and their commonalities through time and space, leaving "little space for more historicized and politicized readings" (7). The intersection between postcolonial children's literature and historical fiction becomes crucial here.

Kim Wilson examines the impact of postcolonial historical fiction for young readers in her book *Re-visioning Historical Fiction for Young Readers: The Past Through Modern Eyes* (2011). She observes that the historical fiction published for children in the last forty years has an "inherently embedded humanistic metanarrative of positive progression" (5). Young readers

are positioned to make-meaning of the past from a 21st century ideological perspective. Wilson further posits that retelling the past is inherently future-oriented because the narrative is moving towards a specific endpoint (5). Positive progression from past to present implies that modern society is progressing forward and is superior to all that came before (5). Character identities are constructed based on their “potential for agency” by 21st century standards (6). The protagonist’s potential for agency is inextricably linked to the author’s potential for agency and their ability to revise and re-interpret history in a specific context for a specific audience. For young readers, the tendency towards positive progression is connected to historical fiction’s longstanding relationship with education and, as de Groot observed, its potential as a tool for upholding and even subverting constructions of national identity.

In the following chapters, I examine Fishbane’s *Maud*, a novel that, I argue, demonstrates the dynamic and problematic intersection of historical fiction, revisionist history, and postcolonial concerns. What social, political, and cultural factors led to the creation of this historical fiction and why is it specifically aimed at a young adult audience? Also, how does this novel negotiate the tension between presenting positive progression for her readers and Montgomery’s historical position as a white Scottish-Presbyterian settler? Using these questions as a starting point, I now examine how Fishbane revises Montgomery’s ideology to make her character palatable for modern young readers.

Chapter 2: Montgomery's Western World: "A Western Eden" and "Tannis of the Flats"

In 1890, fifteen-year-old Montgomery moved from her grandparents' home in Cavendish, Prince Edward Island, to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan to live with her father and new stepmother. Unlike settled Cavendish, Prince Albert, at this time, was a raw frontier town located along a riverbank with a population of 1,090 according to the 1890 census report (Rubio 60). Prince Albert had (and continues to have) a visible Indigenous population; the 2006 "Aboriginal Population Profile for Prince Albert" conducted by the Government of Canada states that Prince Albert has "the highest concentration of Aboriginal people of any city in Saskatchewan" with at least 49% identifying as Métis (Statistics Canada web). These numbers give a sense of how much the presence of Aboriginals stood to affect Montgomery upon her arrival in Prince Albert in 1890.

Prior to Montgomery's arrival in Saskatchewan, the Northwest Rebellion of 1885 had significantly altered government policy in Western Canada. These new measures eventually resulted in the subjugation of the Indigenous people. Sarah Carter observes in *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy*, that white Victorian-Canadians did not understand communal or tribal practices; without private property, individualism or economic surplus, there could be no progress. Practices such as hunting, reserved as a leisure activity for the elite in Victorian England, represented a way of life and survival for the Indigenous. Thus, to the Victorian-Canadian observers, Indigenous hunters were not truly working, choosing the pursuit of pleasure over progress. Such cultural misconceptions fed negative stereotypes of the Plains Indians and provided justification for dispossessing them of their land (Carter 18).

Sir John A. Macdonald's government implemented a variety of strategies to deal with what was then tellingly and insensitively called the "Indian problem," most notably the Indian

Act of 1876 which aimed to eradicate and assimilate the First Nations into Euro-Canadian society (Henderson web). In the Canadian Northwest, these measures were met with resistance from the Métis population, although the Indian Act did not directly apply to them. While the government focussed on turning the First Nations into agricultural farmers (without any tools or assistance), the Métis, who had been farming those same lands for years because of their French ancestors, grew concerned that the Canadian government did not recognize the land as theirs (Carter 49). To make matters worse, the government often delayed or refused to meet with them to give them the proper documentation that proved the land they had been farming was theirs. These tensions culminated in the Northwest Rebellion in 1885, led by the Métis leader Louis Riel. The five-month conflict reached its climax at the Battle of Batoche where the Métis surrendered, and Riel was eventually convicted and sentenced to death in 1885. He was publicly executed in Regina that same year. This event was a turning point in the Canadian federal government's attempt to control the Indigenous population (Beal web). By the time Montgomery arrived in Prince Albert in 1890, the Northwest Rebellion and its aftermath were still a much-discussed topic in the frontier town. Prince Albert was only 27 miles from Batoche, the scene of the final battle, and Montgomery's father, Hugh John Montgomery, claimed to have been a volunteer during the Riel Rebellion, indicating that Montgomery was, to some extent, aware of the events and most likely would have favoured her beloved father's side (the Canadian government) in the conflict (Rubio 60).

At the same time, however, Montgomery also had a desire to understand the Indigenous peoples. Perhaps influenced by the newspapers, literary lectures and other political discussion surrounding the "Indian problem," her journals and letters indicate that she was also keen to explore the subject through literature. In 1900, twenty-six-year-old Montgomery records in her

journal that she has re-read *The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757*, an American historical novel by James Fenimore Cooper published in 1826. Set during the Seven Years' War, where France and Britain used Native American allies, this novel capitalizes on romanticized stereotypes such as the "Vanishing Indian" and the "Noble Savage." Both stereotypes contributed to this imagined version of what the Indigenous people were and how they circulated within the Euro-Canadian settler culture. These idealized figures are, in fact, still part of the discourse today on Indigenous identity. Since the eighteenth century, these projected identities had taken root.

Of course, stereotypes associated with the "Imaginary Indian" reveal more about the discourse of the white settlers than the Indigenous people themselves. Likewise, Montgomery's reading and writing of the Indigenous reveals more about the imagined construction than the reality. As Daniel Francis explains in his book *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, "[t]he 'fact' that Indians were a vanishing breed made them especially attractive to artists." He continues: "Often the result was an idealized image of the Indian based on what the artist imagined aboriginal life to have been before contact" (24).¹

As discussed in Chapter 1 above, historical novels often follow a narrative of positive progression, which in this case brings readers from the imagined "glory days" of the Native Americans before European contact, to Montgomery's present day "extinction." Montgomery was profoundly influenced by the characterization of the Indigenous in Cooper's *The Last of the*

¹ Francis credits Toronto artist Paul Kane with popularizing the myth that the "red man" was disappearing in Canada. He felt it was his artistic duty to "preserve" their "traditional customs and appearance on canvas" (Francis 16). He set out on his expedition, although, as Francis notes, he had a limited and superficial understanding of the Indigenous culture. Yet, to the Euro-Canadian, "the Indian of the nineteenth-century Canada is Paul Kane's Indian" (22).

Mohicans and the subsequent downfall of the once noble Indian race. In her journal entry, she states that she had read the novel “long ago in schooldays” and that she had borrowed it from Nate Lockhart (the Baptist minister’s stepson and Montgomery’s first beau). She continues: “we were both charmed with the story and used to discuss its characters and incidents enthusiastically” (CJ 1: 453). Her copy of the book remains in the University of Guelph archives and she likely re-read it more than once as was her habit with books she owned. Montgomery’s reading of the West through Cooper’s romanticized historical novel would later influence her writings on the West.

But more than a reader, Montgomery was also a keen observer of the social reality of her era. In her journals she obsessively records her surroundings, and Prince Albert, with its large concentration of Indigenous or people of Indigenous descent, provided plenty of new visual and social stimulants for the budding writer who can use them in her writing, admittedly from her privileged position as a white colonial settler. However, it would be erroneous to dismiss her observations as a mere uncritical reproduction of the ideologies of her times; such a deterministic approach reduces writers to mere transcribers of cultural norms (Bradford 20). Instead, Montgomery’s writing on the Indigenous population in Prince Albert represents a complex cultural construction that reveals Montgomery both perpetuating and simultaneously deconstructing the glorified and demonized versions of Indigenous peoples by drawing on her own experience and observations, both prior and during her visit to Prince Albert.

For example, Montgomery was familiar with the Mi’kmaq population on Prince Edward Island, whom she refers to in her first letter from Prince Albert to cousin Penzie Macneill in 1890, presenting a comparison that also speaks to her own evolving and conflicting, though clearly exoticizing, perception:

There are plenty of Indians to be seen here. They look so funny. The men all wear their hair long and in two braids hanging down their backs. It looks so queer. Their hair is pretty being very straight and glossy and of beautiful blue-black. They don't look a single bit like our Indians down home but are much handsomer. (86).

Phrases like “our Indians” and “down home” are possessive signifiers, revealing Montgomery's sense of ownership over both the Mi'kmaq peoples and Prince Edward Island itself. Perhaps, it is this sense of ownership over Prince Edward Island that allows Montgomery to scrutinize the Indigenous peoples of Prince Albert in her Western writing with the eye of a traveler (and tourist). Prince Albert was not truly her home; therefore, her observations of the landscape and its inhabitants are not clouded by nostalgia. Thus, her personal letter demonstrates a slight shift from both romanticism and demonization to glimpses of social realism in her understanding of the Indigenous people of Prince Albert.

On June 6, 1891, sixteen-year-old Montgomery writes in her journal: “I am writing an article on Saskatchewan for *The Times* here, and have it nearly done. I've given a description of the prairies and scenery and the characteristics of Indians and will finish up with a flower peroration on the possibilities of the country as a whole” (CJ 1: 72). The matter of fact tone suggests that Montgomery feels no true connection to the spirit of Prince Albert, though she is self-aware that she substitutes this lack of connection with nation-building rhetoric and flowery prose. The writing experiment results in the essay, “A Western Eden,” which was published in the Prince Albert *Times* in 1891. As the idealizing title suggests, the essay begins with a lengthy romanticized description of Saskatchewan's landscape, including the “breezy hilltops” and “hazy purple mists” (“A Western Eden” 37). Romantic language symbolizes the potential for progress,

at least by white, Euro-Canadian standards. The emphasis on the untouched landscape and the possessive proclamation “This is my own, my native land!” erases any Indigenous presence. The word “native” itself signifies a white, Euro-Canadian and not an Indigenous person. Montgomery’s description of Saskatchewan reinforces attachment to place on a national, rather than a localized, scale (Collins-Gearing 169). Even today, “our home and native land” remains the opening line of Canada’s national anthem. The patriotic sentiment forges a national identity predicated on claiming land and eliminating previous inhabitants. While the first half of Montgomery’s essay is exclusively devoted to Saskatchewan’s potential for progress, the second half takes an unexpected turn to the Indigenous presence in the province. She shares with the reader that her “misty” impressions of the Indigenous were influenced by Cooper’s historical novel (“A Western Eden” 39). Her vision of the “dusky warrior” clad in his traditional clothing mimics Cooper’s Noble Savage stereotype; an image that is familiar to her target audience of white settler Euro-Canadians. But, she abruptly dismantles this vision, declares the warrior to be extinct and looks instead to her situation in Prince Albert. She writes:

... look at the poor Indian now, clad in ragged garments fashioned after those of his conqueror, with a dirty blanket flung over his shoulder, as he shuffles through the busy streets of another race, glancing upward with cowed submission in his dark eyes, or engages in chopping wood and other menial tasks for the white man, the last atom of romance vanishes, leaving only pity and compassion behind (40).

Phrases like “conqueror” and “cowed submission” insinuate that the Indigenous people have already lost their independence and culture. The wording suggests that assimilation is the natural historical endpoint for the Indigenous peoples; poverty and social realism will replace romance.

Whereas in this essay, her observations supply a realist critique and epilogue for the Noble Savages of Cooper's novel, in another work from this Western period of writing Montgomery explores these dynamics from the perspective of a Métis woman.

The short story "Tannis of the Flats (1920), set in Saskatchewan, was also inspired by Montgomery's time in Canada's Northwest. Although many scholars have referenced this short story for its shocking and disturbing racial slurs,² few have actually examined this short story critically. "Tannis of the Flats" is Montgomery's psychological and social analysis of a young Métis woman and the various identities she navigates. The narrator, who remains an anonymous Prince Edward Islander, recalls his neighbour, Tom Blair, and the story of his sister Elinor and the complex reasons for why she never married after returning from the "Flats," in Saskatchewan. For the most part, the narrator remains unobtrusive, and though the story begins with Elinor, it is entirely centred on Tannis, a young Métis woman who often passes as white and falls in love with a white Englishman, Jerome Carey. Racial consciousness plays a prominent role in the unhappy romance, and Carey, who does not take the relationship too seriously is nonetheless attracted to her sexual "otherness." This becomes clear to Tannis as soon as a white woman, Elinor Blair, enters the story: a rival whose presence prompts Tannis to re-evaluate her racial identity; she sadly concludes that she cannot compete with that "other" woman (213).

In this context, Montgomery uses a heteroglossic narrative style, with two contrasting viewpoints, as a method of distancing herself from the character's prejudiced opinions (Lefebvre

² Many scholars reference the short story in passing, as Elizabeth Waterston does in her seminal 1966 article (Lucy Maud Montgomery 1874-1942), but for the most part, it remains relegated to footnotes. Benjamin Lefebvre's footnote in "Pigsties and Sunsets: L. M. Montgomery, *A Tangled Web*, and a Modernism of Her Own" declares that the story "includes numerous racist terms and assumptions concerning its Aboriginal and Métis characters" (142).

142). For example, the priest Father Gabriel expresses his doubts about Tannis and Carey's relationship: "religions might mingle, but the different bloods—ah, it was not the right thing!" (211) In contrast, Tannis's father, Old Auguste, is not opposed to the match. The narrator expresses more blatantly racist opinions such as: "There is no worse enemy in all the world than a half-breed. Your true Indian is bad enough, but his diluted descendant is ten times worse" (211). It's worth recalling that this bluntly racist statement is filtered through the narrator, a character previously presented to the reader as narrow-minded and parochial; as a result, the words become a realist and satiric critique of racist ideology, revealing Montgomery's own distance (in relation to the narrator). Indeed, Tannis herself performs an angry critique of racism:

What difference does it make about me—a half-breed girl? We breed girls are only born to amuse the white men. That is so—is it not? Then when they are tired of us they push us aside and go back to their own kind. Oh, it is very well (214).

Tannis's passionate outburst presents a forceful critique of race and gender relations between white men and Indigenous women. The speech is scornful and accusatory exposing the racist rhetoric the colonizers ("half-breed" and "breed"), a colonial rhetoric moreover preoccupied with sexuality and reproduction. As Tannis threatens the status quo of an unequal society, her race becomes the barrier that prevents her from achieving romantic happiness; such happiness is reserved for white women. The short story leaves readers with the unresolved ambiguity of Montgomery's signature style. The story's thematic of race relations becomes problematic for 21st century readers and writers who yearn for more affirmative expressions of racial harmony and may cringe at the discomfort of racial slurs even when these slurs come from the mouths of problematic characters. 21st century ideology demands straightforward explicit stances on

authorial intent, specifically with sensitive issues like race but Montgomery's contradictory stance challenges a straightforward interpretation.

Montgomery's letters, journals, essay and short story indicate that she had well-thought out, educated opinions on the topic of Indigenous peoples. More than parroting the colonizer rhetoric of her times, she considers appearance, poverty and race relations in her Western writings. That said, by 21st century standards, Montgomery is guilty of perpetuating colonizing attitudes in her writing, which leaves readers uncertain about an author whose writing they may admire and yet who articulated values they do not agree with. The very complexity of the issue, the ambiguities and conflictedness of the author, may concern marketing departments who may favor a more forward-looking discourse. As the following chapter will demonstrate, Fishbane sought to remedy these issues by removing Montgomery's ambiguity and she did so by creating Maud with more updated values in terms of Indigenous issues. Her process reveals the complex nature of reconstructing the past, but also the danger of using a character's motive to justify past historical wrongs.

Chapter 3: A *Maud* of Her Own: Melanie Fishbane's Revisionist Representation of Indigenous Peoples

In the last three decades, especially in North America (but also globally), there has been an increased market demand for children's historical fiction to create stories centred on "fully agentic heroines" (Wilson 7). *Maud* follows this trend, and was, perhaps, created to satisfy this demand. Indeed, there is an equal demand for diversity in children's historical fiction, and often such inclusions involve re-writing and re-visioning from alternate perspectives (Wilson 7). While historians generally avoid using presentism (that is, projecting contemporary values onto the past) when studying history, the author of historical fiction, who is seeking a market for her work, may be required to do so to make her narrative relatable to twenty-first century young readers and their parents. Consequently, there is a risk that authors can misrepresent the past, and in the case of Montgomery, Fishbane moulds her into more of an Indigenous ally than the historical evidence suggests. This chapter considers how Fishbane uses historical revisionism to provide positive progression in her historical fiction for young readers. Conversely, I also examine revisionism's potential to mislead young readers in terms of the Montgomery's actual—and considerably more conflicted—attitudes towards Indigenous peoples. In the following, I focus on two specific episodes that illuminate the dynamic of revisionism, although it is not my intention to denounce revisionist history in historical fiction per se; instead, I consider the process and transparency inherent in historical fiction as well as the implications, specifically for young readers, in the act of revision in ideology of a well-known Canadian historical figure like Montgomery.

Insight can be found in Fishbane's Author's Note, "More About Maud and Her Times," which outlines her writing and research process and the questions she felt compelled to address

in her revisionist approach to Montgomery's story. Fishbane considers Montgomery's motives in her writing, and in turn, how these motives influenced Maud's development as a character. Making no claims of ultimate historical accuracy, she admits: "My Maud had to be inspired by history, but she also had to be authentic. I needed to make her my own" (368). Possessive language such as "My Maud" and "my own" indicate that Fishbane appropriates the historical Montgomery for her own purposes. The paratextual elements, such as the book cover, the "Cast of Characters," the sections in the back of the book titled "More About Maud and Her Times" and "In Gratitude" as well as the extensive list of "References" for further reading indicate to the reader that this novel is Fishbane's work and Fishbane's interpretation of Montgomery and not a historically accurate reconstruction of Montgomery's life. For example, the "Cast of Characters" states that the characters listed "are not reflective of the real L.M. Montgomery's complete family tree" (Fishbane, "Cast of Characters" ix) while the opening sentence in "More About Maud and Her Times" states: "This story is not a biography. While the plot, characters, and places are based on many primary and secondary sources, this is first and foremost a work of historical fiction" (368). Indeed, *Maud* does fit de Groot and Wyile's definition of historical fiction: it is set during a time that is at least fifty years before the author's lifetime, it uses narrative conventions such as third-person narration and dialogue, and it presents events as if they are happening in real time (de Groot 182; Wyile 7). While *Maud* does not qualify as a work of historiographic metafiction, as defined by Hutcheon, as the novel misses the self-consciously experimental and postmodern play with conventions and narrative, the fact that Fishbane shares aspects of her writing process with her readers does create a more conventional and separate form of metanarrative, where the reader is invested in her reconstructive process just as much as they are invested in the historical Montgomery.

Fishbane shares with her readers: “‘A Western Eden’ and her journals have language and opinions that are offensive to us today” and while Maud would have felt compassion for the plight of the Indigenous peoples, “she would have seen them as less than her” (“More About Maud” 371). However, Maud’s behaviour in the novel suggests otherwise; her compassion for their plight is often emphasized over her racial prejudice, particularly when it comes to her friendship with the character Edie. Alternatively, Fishbane could have ignored this aspect altogether and focussed exclusively on the Euro-Canadian settlers, but this would have perpetuated a longstanding tradition of whitewashing and excluding other historical perspectives. Moreover, the call for diversity in Canadian literature by scholars such as Doris Wolf and Brynn F. Welch has seen a surge of stories centered on topics of diversity for mainstream audiences. Wolf examines the potential of Indigenous counter-narratives to “restory” mainstream attitudes, which is an essential aspect of reconciliation (207-234), and Welch argues that it is the consumer’s responsibility to demand books with multidimensional characters of colour (388). Including an Indigenous perspective may have been a well-thought out marketing strategy for *Maud*, especially from the publisher’s perspective. Thus, Fishbane’s historical revisionism could be attributed to marketing demands as much as political correctness.

Authors of historical fiction, as de Groot and Wyile observe, often find ways to indicate to their readers that they have thoroughly conducted historical research (de Groot 183). Fishbane shares that her impression of Montgomery’s connection to the Indigenous peoples was formed by reading “A Western Eden,” “Tannis of the Flats” and her journal entries. As an author trying to make her character sympathetic, and perhaps, looking for reasons to rationalize Montgomery’s ideology, Fishbane concludes that Montgomery was both affected and sympathetic towards Indigenous people (“More About Maud” 371). As the author, Fishbane is in the privileged

position not so much of knowing but of determining just how much her character, Maud, would have been affected by the Indigenous in Prince Albert, and she does so in two ways: 1) prescribing a new invented Métis identity to Maud's historical roommate and friend, Edie Skelton; and 2) re-visioning Montgomery's meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald. Thus, Fishbane's narrative conforms to the tradition of revisionary historical fiction by presenting Maud as sympathetic, rather than apathetic, toward the Indigenous people. At the same time, she achieves this goal through a heavy dose of revisionary fabrications and inventions; the moments also that reveal Fishbane's imagination as a writer.

As Montgomery gets settled in Eglintoune Villa with her father, new stepmother, and half-sister, she meets and shares her room with the hired help, a girl by the name of Edith Skelton from Battleford. Montgomery records in her journal that Edith is a "lovely girl" and the two soon become fast friends (CJ 1: 43). Montgomery's journal entries suggest that she really appreciated Edith's (or Edie's) companionship and loyalty during her first bouts of homesickness. In Fishbane's novel, however, Maud is less than pleased to discover she will be sharing her room with the "hired girl" (159). Although Maud eventually warms up to her new roommate, there is a sense of difference between the two that runs deeper than class difference. The reason is revealed during a conversation they have while picking hazelnuts along the Prince Albert riverbanks. At first, Edie is on the defensive when Maud questions her about her family, but Maud soon begins to put the pieces together, recalling that her stepmother once referred to Edie as the "half-breed" (168). However, Edie does not immediately reveal her racial identity. Instead, she answers all of Maud's pressing questions; Edie becomes the authority on interracial identity, teaching Maud (and the reader) as pupils. Edie shares that the other women on the riverbank are speaking Cree and that they call themselves *Nehiyawak* which means "the People"

(168). She further shares that her mother speaks Cree, but that she speaks a language that blends Cree and French called Michif, because it is the language of the Métis (168). Although Maud is shocked to find out she is sharing a room with the hired girl, she is not at all surprised to discover that the hired girl is also Métis. This implies that Maud's primary objections are based on class rather than race, which could potentially mislead twenty-first century readers regarding the real Montgomery's attitude towards Indigenous and Métis people. Indeed, in her journals she often refers to them as "half-breeds" or even "nitchie" (another derogatory term) (CJ 1: 45).

Maud is an eager pupil, saying she "adores" hearing the history of a place and requesting Edie to tell her "its spirit" (169). Edie obliges, and tells her that the Saskatchewan river is Cree in origin and that the river they are on loosely translates to "swift-flowing river" (169). Maud makes a connection between the Prince Albert Indigenous people and the Prince Edward Island Indigenous people, the Mi'kmaq, though the past tense she uses suggests that they are historical, and not presently living on the Island (169). Edie has the opportunity to pursue the topic further, but, significantly, responds with an agreeable "yes," and continues to pick her hazelnuts in silence. This silence is significant and is representative of a larger silence in which Indigenous are exoticized and historicized and cannot change the impressions that Euro-Canadian settlers project onto them. Edie does not challenge Maud's opinions directly, though Fishbane implies that their friendship, to some extent, forms Maud's later observations of the Indigenous in Prince Albert. When Edie reveals that she wants to become a teacher, but only certain schools accept Métis women, Maud realizes their common ambitions which in turn positions them as equals; both teens are on a quest for further education despite the social and cultural forces that do not necessarily endorse these ambitions. Their conversation reaffirms the concept of positive progression, where Maud's sympathy for Edie elicits sympathy from the reader because the

reader is aware that both could achieved their ambitions were they not confined by outdated attitudes. To the 21st century reader, the past becomes conflated with traditional or backwards values that restrict a character's potential for agency. This creates a dichotomy between good (the present) and evil (the past), where those who espouse traditional rhetoric can be easily villainized, as is the case with Sir John A. Macdonald in *Maud*.

On August 11, 1890, Montgomery records in her journal that she met Sir John A. Macdonald with her Grandpa Montgomery on her travels to Prince Albert. While she comments upon his appearance (a “spry-looking” man) and the appearance of Lady Macdonald (dressed “very dowdily”) she does not provide details of their conversation (CJ 1: 36). Fishbane, at first, recreates this meeting just as Montgomery records it—an anti-climatic, somewhat dull experience. As the Prime Minister and Grandpa Montgomery discuss shipyard closures, Maud is too occupied with the elegant furniture and observing the Macdonalds than listening to their conversation. Indeed, this meeting would have been just as insignificant as it was in Montgomery's journal were it not used as the catalyst for Fishbane's historical revisionism later in the novel. Once Maud is settled in Prince Albert, she comes across “a few men huddled, shuffling, in Hudson's Bay blankets” (Fishbane 182) on her way to her new High School. She makes eye contact with one of the men with “his brown eyes seeing right through her” (182). This interaction prompts a flashback to her meeting with Sir John A. Macdonald, where she recalls that he appeared proud of “keeping the Indians on the verge of starvation as a way to teach them a lesson” (182). Fishbane intentionally leaves this crucial conversation point out of her first recreation of the meeting, placing it in the narrative just as Maud is directly confronted with the harsh reality. Of course, there is no way to prove or verify what Macdonald said in his conversation with Montgomery's grandfather, but such sentiments were in line with many of

Macdonald's policies concerning the Indigenous peoples. Significantly, Fishbane uses this flashback to highlight the Canadian government's history of colonial violence towards the Indigenous people, while underplaying the real Montgomery's own role in perpetuating similar ideology. Maud feels pity for the starving men and admits that witnessing the scene "troubled her" (182). She does not take any decisive action at this point, but her inner conflict on the matter suggests that the fault lies with the Canadian government and men like Sir John A. Macdonald. By placing this flashback at this precise point in the narrative, re-visioning Montgomery's conversation with the Prime Minister, Fishbane absolves Maud of her guilt and complicity in the mistreatment of the Indigenous people in Prince Albert. One of Maud's companions, Annie McTaggart, continues their conversation "quickly forgetting about the starving men" (182). In contrast, Maud's pity and compassion for the starving men makes her appear progressive, more so than those around her, and creates dramatic irony for the reader. The modern reader knows how this story for the Indigenous people "ends" and how the sequence of historical events will lead to what Kim Wilson refers to as the "endpoint." The long-term consequences have included the pain of residential schools, unresolved land claims, and racism as well as continued institutionalized problems for Indigenous peoples since Montgomery's lifetime. Present-day discussions and initiatives by the government have included efforts at redress, reconciliation, and public education. The reader also knows that Maud has no way of knowing this and is more inclined to sympathize with Maud's inaction than to condemn her for it. As Maud, Annie and Edie are leaving the High School after the first day, again they encounter "more men and women shuffling past, all of them very skinny," prompting Maud to reflect, "wasn't she supposed to help? Isn't that what they were always doing at church, sending money to the missions?... There was so much to understand in this New Eden" (186). Such reflections continue to position Maud

as a sympathetic witness, one who wants to help but does not know how. Simultaneously, the reader is also confronted with the irony that such missions were more damaging than helpful to the Indigenous peoples. Current-day Canadian readers inevitably read such references within the context of Truth and Reconciliation.

Fishbane's historical revisionist narrative suggests that Maud's guilt about being unable to help the starving Indigenous stems, in part, from her friendship with Edie. Although Maud tries to look away from the starving men, as the white Euro-Canadian settlers often did, Edie does not (182). As a Métis woman, Edie provides an essential alternative perspective to balance Maud's Euro-centric perspective. Unfortunately, her character's place in the novel is short-lived, as Mrs. Montgomery sends her away within a few chapters after their informative conversation. While it is historically accurate that Mrs. Montgomery sent Edith Skelton away, hoping that Montgomery would take her place as servant, Fishbane could have kept her character longer so that the Métis perspective was fully fleshed out. As it stands, Edie's character serves as a one-dimensional representation for all Métis people, without much further development or depth. In fact, the reader never learns what happens to Edie once she leaves the story. That said, her racial identity is, as Fishbane reveals in "More About Maud and Her Times," entirely constructed by herself. She states: "Maud did share a room with the maid, Edith (Edie) Skelton, but it isn't clear that she was Métis... I decided to give Edie this identity" ("More About Maud" 372). She explains that this friendship would have given Maud, the character, a "personal reason" to write about the Indigenous in her essay "A Western Eden" ("More About Maud" 372). This confession demonstrates that a contemporary interpretation of Montgomery's writing can be re-shaped and revised through historical fiction. This could also prompt modern readers to examine the short

story, “Tannis of the Flats,” to understand why Montgomery chose a Métis woman as her protagonist and to ask whether Tannis’s character challenges or upholds colonial stereotypes.

Fishbane also shares that she worked closely with Gloria Lee, a Cree- Métis from Chitek Lake to “help give Edie a voice” (“More About Maud” 372), to ensure that Edie’s character was not entirely filtered through a Euro-Canadian perspective. Despite this attention to authenticity and detail, the connection could be lost on the modern young reader because there is no copy of “A Western Eden” or “Tannis of the Flats” available as an appendix or paratext to the novel. The inclusion of the writing that inspired Edie’s character would have strengthened Fishbane’s revisionist interpretation and provided essential context for the reader. At the presentation of an earlier version of this paper, at the 13th biennial L.M. Montgomery Conference in Prince Edward Island, Fishbane shared with the audience that one of her editors, in an early draft of the novel, assumed Edie was Métis (UPEI June 2018). An editor, perhaps even more so than an author, would be familiar with the current landscape of Canadian publishing and which topics sell well. The editor’s initial interpretation of Edie’s racial identity reflects the demand for diversity in Canadian fiction. Thus, the decision to prescribe Edie with a Métis identity was not solely Fishbane’s, but rather, it was a collaborative process that reflects current issues in Canadian publishing.

As Clare Bradford points out, “there is no such thing as an innocent text... all texts are informed by ideologies” (14). For example, the *Dear Canada* series, a series of historical fiction diaries written by fictionalized girls who lived through significant events in Canadian history, was criticized for presenting these events from Euro-Canadian perspectives. In “Reading Whiteness in *Dear Canada* and *I Am Canada*: Historical Fiction of a Multicultural Nation,” Andrea Zerebeski argues that “white settler naturalization occurs in Canada through the way that

history is told through story” (159). That said, there are certain narrative techniques used to highlight the historic racial hierarchies, as Zerebeski notes with Carol Matas’s *Footsteps in the Snow*. The protagonist, Isobel Scott, can be immediately identified as racist by readers, but, by the end, the reader sees the transformation in her perceptions. Zerebeski criticizes this “change of heart” as a literary trope that does not fully engage with instances of systematic racism in Canadian history (163-164). However, it does highlight some of Fishbane’s narrative technique borrowed for *Maud* to deal with Montgomery’s racism. Fishbane admits that for certain sections of the novel, specifically the ones set in Prince Albert, some of the language was “replicated to show the times” (“More About Maud” 371). This, of course, presents the risk that the reader will not be able to recognize the author’s intentional racism and the author could blindly perpetuate the ideology they are trying to deconstruct. There is no “correct” way to reconstruct the past, but it does require care and sensitivity, which is why there are increasing demands for more diverse representation, as Zerebeski suggests in her article. Therefore, we can view the addition of Edie’s Métis identity in *Maud* as part of a larger genre shift in postcolonial historical fiction for young readers, one that revises and explores alternative perspectives. While it may not be a perfect representation of Indigenous issues, it is a step in the right direction and an important gateway for young readers to begin grappling with complex truths, such as the fact that a beloved figure like L.M. Montgomery may have held values that are not considered appropriate today.

Conclusion

Part of the reading experience is carrying one's own ideological assumptions and personal connections into the reading. Naturally, this process influences reader expectations of certain characters and historical figures. L.M. Montgomery is no exception. Those who read Melanie Fishbane's historical fiction, *Maud*, will expect to see their version of Montgomery reflected in the pages. Or perhaps, their version of Anne Shirley, as the two have long been conflated with one another. But, this is not the story that Fishbane wrote. Her *Maud* reflects 21st century ideals of female agency and racial tolerance. She is inspired by history but is not entirely restricted by it. The separation between the historical L.M. Montgomery and the character, Maud, requires the reader to perform suspension of disbelief. The reader is made aware that the real Montgomery would have seen the Indigenous people as "less than her," as her Western writings demonstrate, but they can also believe that Maud felt sympathy for them if her friend and roommate was Métis. The separation between Montgomery and Maud thus mirrors a separation between an imagined past and the present. The protagonist of a historical fiction becomes the utopian vision of what present day readers wish the past to be. The reader will always be situated to interpret the past while informed by the present. This process reaffirms present positions on certain topics and that is precisely what historical fiction aims to achieve according to de Groot and Wylie.

Historical fiction tends to reveal more about the time in which it is written than the historical time period it represents. Indeed, *Maud* reveals more about 21-century society than Montgomery's society, given the ongoing debates surrounding Truth and Reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian government. As I write this paper, there is a heated debate surrounding the cancelation of plans to re-write the Ontario curriculum to include Indigenous content (Johnson CBC web). The trend in Canadian literature focuses on issues of representation

and diversity, and also on giving indigenous authors their own voices instead of intentionally or unintentionally appropriating nature culture and voices. Indeed, these attempts at inclusivity have contributed, in part, to debates surrounding the appropriation of Indigenous content for self-serving purposes. This debate highlights issues of Indigenous representation; not so much what is being represented but who is representing whom. There is a push for diverse representation in authorship as well as content. To that end, some may consider Fishbane's addition of a Métis character an appropriation of Indigenous culture. It is a contentious debate, as the alternative is offering no Indigenous perspective at all and keeping the story within the confines of white Euro-centric society. Although this paper has demonstrated the dangers of glossing over the historical Montgomery's racist attitudes, and has also pointed out the dangers of appropriation, historical fiction for young readers should serve as the catalyst for these difficult discussions.

In the end, it is my hope that this paper demonstrates that there are broader implications of historical revisionism in historical fiction for young readers that deserve critical attention. How do we approach beloved historical figures who may have upheld values we do not agree with today? How do we demonstrate this to young readers in a nuanced way? Fishbane's *Maud* has the potential to omit or obscure issues of Indigenous marginalization as much as reveal them. In the end, her novel addresses itself to a new generation of young readers who are discovering L.M. Montgomery in the 21st century, influenced by 21st century ideologies. It is up to those young readers of Fishbane's historical fiction to do their own digging and uncover both Montgomery and Fishbane's motives as authors. As Fishbane puts it: "My hope is that you will find something in my Maud to inspire you to ask questions, read her fiction, and discover your own ideas, your own truth, about who you think she is. And, perhaps, find a story of your own" (374).

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