
**INTERVIEW WITH KATE SCARTH,
CHAIR OF L. M. MONTGOMERY STUDIES
AT THE L. M. MONTGOMERY INSTITUTE**

Entrevista com Kate Scarth, diretora da área de Estudos
sobre L. M. Montgomery no L. M. Montgomery Institute

Tatiane Rodrigues Lopes dos Santos¹
Eliane Aparecida Galvão Ribeiro Ferreira²

L. M. Montgomery (Lucy Maud Montgomery) was a Canadian author born in Clifton (now New London), Prince Edward Island, on November 30, 1874, to Hugh John Montgomery and Clara Woolner Macneill. She is best known for her work *Anne of Green Gables*, published in 1908 by the L. C. Page Company of Boston. An immediate best-seller, the book marked the beginning of Montgomery's successful career as a novelist. In her lifetime, she wrote twenty novels, one autobiography, and hundreds of short stories and poems. Admired internationally for over one hundred years, L. M. Montgomery's works have been translated into more than thirty languages. She died in Toronto, Ontario, on April 24, 1942³.

The L. M. Montgomery Institute (LMMI), housed in the Robertson Library at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI), honours L. M. Montgomery's achievements and provides a dynamic research center focused on her life and works. During a training program conducted by the CAPES Foundation (Brazilian Federal Foundation for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education)⁴ at the LMMI, we were able to interview Dr. Kate

¹ Tatiane Rodrigues Lopes dos Santos is a Master's student in Literature at the Assis campus of the São Paulo State University (UNESP). She has a Languages (Portuguese and English) degree from UNESP – Assis campus. Email address: tatiane.lopes@unesp.br.

² Eliane Aparecida Galvão Ribeiro Ferreira holds a Ph.D. in Literature from the Assis campus of the São Paulo State University (UNESP). She is a professor at UNESP and the coordinator of the Master's degree and Ph.D. Program in Literature of UNESP – Assis campus. Email address: eliane.galvao@unesp.br.

³ Information available at: <https://lmmontgomery.ca/about/lmm/her-life/>. Access on October 24, 2023.

⁴ Through the CAPES-PRINT Program, CAPES Foundation has awarded Tatiane Rodrigues Lopes dos Santos a scholarship to conduct her training at the University of Prince Edward Island.

Scarth, current Chair of L. M. Montgomery Studies at the LMMI, in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.

Kate Scarth is an Associate Professor in UPEI Faculty of Arts' innovative program, Applied Communication, Leadership, and Culture (ACLCL). With a Ph.D. in English Literature, she has taught widely in literary studies, including introductions to literature and critical theory and British Romanticism. Her research focuses in the intersection between place and story, especially in Atlantic Canada and more broadly in literatures and culture in Canada⁵.

1. The L. M. Montgomery Institute (LMMI) celebrates its 30th anniversary in 2023. As the Chair of L. M. Montgomery Studies at the LMMI, could you tell us about the LMMI's contributions to promoting research into the life and works of L. M. Montgomery?

KS: The L. M. Montgomery Institute's promotion of research into the life, work, context, and legacy of L. M. Montgomery is an essential part of the Institute's mandate. Since its founding, the Institute has hosted a biennial conference that welcomes scholars and readers from many parts of the world to share scholarship about Montgomery. That's been the Institute's flagship event. In 2019, the Institute launched the *Journal of L. M. Montgomery Studies*⁶ which is an online open access platform sharing peer-reviewed scholarship, creative writing, and other innovative responses to Montgomery. We host a visiting scholar every two years who leads the conference planning and who edits a collection of work coming out of that conference; this is a wonderful way to collaborate with and benefit from the expertise of a scholar with an established research record. We employ students who get interesting research experiences working on projects like a map of Montgomery's Prince Edward Island⁷. The Institute supports scholars in all kinds of ways through visits, for example, to the UPEI special collections to use archival material.

2. A variety of research has been done on L. M. Montgomery. Do you believe that scholarly interest in Montgomery's life, works, culture, and influence has waned or increased in the past years? What can young researchers and scholars offer to the L. M. Montgomery Studies?

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⁵ Information available at: <<https://katescarth.com/>>. Access on October 24, 2023.

⁶ Information available at: <<https://journaloflmmontgomerystudies.ca/>>. Access on October 24, 2023.

⁷ Information available at: <<https://lmmontgomery.ca/montgomerys-pei-map-island-sites-related-author>>. Access on October 24, 2023.

KS: Scholarly interest in Montgomery's life, works, culture, and influence has only increased and become more vibrant and dynamic in recent years. Scholarship today is possible because of the foundational work of scholars like Elizabeth Waterston, Mary Rubio, and Elizabeth Epperly, who were not encouraged to study Montgomery: she was not seen as a worthy subject of academic study. Current research on making sense of Montgomery's reception in various countries and of her work in translation is a fascinating avenue of scholarly inquiry at the moment. I'm really looking forward to hearing more from scholars from Brazil, in particular, since *Anne Green Gables* and Montgomery have become so popular in your country thanks to the Netflix series *Anne with an E*. Scholars' attention to readers' and fans' responses is an exciting branch of scholarship too. There's a lot of scope for better understanding Montgomery's legacy which includes adaptations in dance, film, TV, vlogs, podcasts, and so many genres.

3. The life and works of L. M. Montgomery have been exploited for commercial and tourist purposes. In Prince Edward Island, one can visit the "L. M. Montgomery Birthplace," the "Macneill Homestead," and "Green Gables" (which includes the bedrooms of the characters Anne Shirley, Marilla, and Matthew Cuthbert). In Charlottetown, one can find the stores "The Anne of Green Gables Store" and the "Anne of Green Gables Chocolate Store," as well as many establishments named after Montgomery's novels. Could this contribute to the recognition of L. M. Montgomery's legacy or lead to an overestimation of her life and work, including among Islanders? Does this commercialization generate more positive or negative effects?

KS: It's great that tourists can come to PEI and visit so many sites related to Montgomery's life and work. What we get in terms of the commercial and tourist side of Montgomery is actually an overemphasis on *Anne*, rather than Montgomery's life or work more generally. One challenge is making sure that people—Islanders, people in the tourism industry, and visitors—know that there's a lot more to Anne than red braids and there's more to Montgomery too. She wrote twenty other novels, hundreds of short stories and poems, letters, diaries. She was a photographer, teacher, journalist, a community leader (as a minister's wife), an astute businesswoman, and a public literary figure. She was a mother, a wife, a grandmother, a friend. Many of the sites, such as the Macneill homestead, the Anne of Green Gables Museum in Park Corner, the new interpretive centre at Green Gables, point to this interesting complexity.

Here are some photographs of "L. M. Montgomery Birthplace," and the "Macneill Homestead".

Images 1, 2, and 3 : The “L. M. Montgomery Birthplace” (photograph 1) and part of the “Macneill Homestead” (photographs 2 and 3), in Prince Edward Island



Source: Personal collections, 2023.

Following are images depicting the “Green Gables Museum”, which includes “Anne’s room”:

Images 4, 5, and 6: Photograph of the “Green Gables Museum”, including “Anne’s room”, in Prince Edward Island





Source: Personal collections, 2023.

4. Many of L. M. Montgomery's novels fit into various genres and categories: writings by women, "Bildungsroman," and children's literature. Has considering her works as children's books influenced how readers and critics have received or analyzed them?

KS: Montgomery talks in her memoir, *The Alpine Path: The Story of My Career*, about how *Anne of Green Gables* was well received from people from all walks of life and different generations, from children to grandparents, from a soldier about to leave to fight in WWI to writer Mark Twain to British prime minister Stanley Baldwin to Canadian Governor General Earl Grey. Many of today's scholars first encountered Montgomery's world as adults, not as children as we might expect.

Between World War I and II, critics like William Arthur Deacon were trying to establish the literary movement of modernism in Canada. Deacon and others held Montgomery's work up as everything that modernism was not: her work was old-fashioned (Victorian), sentimental (overly emotional), for children, not rooted in the modern world, in gritty realism, in so-called adult themes. This critical dismissal hurt Montgomery's reputation for decades and continues to do so in some ways, despite the Herculean efforts of scholars to show her works' value as books for girls *and* many others and as literature deserving of analysis and respect.

5. What is your view of the relationship between L. M. Montgomery and the Canadian canon? Is it safe to say Montgomery's works have a secure and unquestionable position in the Canadian canon? Or can this position still be shaken?

KS: Growing out of the modernist dismissal of Montgomery's work, her position in the Canadian canon can sometimes still be a bit tenuous. Of course, it all depends on who you ask: for many scholars of English literature, creative writing, women's writing, library studies, history, et cetera and people outside the university, Montgomery's place in the canon is obvious. However, Montgomery scholars shouldn't be complacent. It's important to keep sharing scholarship with the world, reminding people, including other scholars, of the value of Montgomery's work and legacy.

6. Do you believe L. M. Montgomery's works can contribute to the critical formation of young readers and positively impact the readers' worldviews? Why or why not?

KS: I don't think this is disputable. Scholars love to talk about how Montgomery's work shaped them as young (and older) readers and positively impacted their worldview in terms of giving them a sense of self, an understanding of the importance of friendship, of nature, of community. Trinna Frever and I collected over 200 stories from countries around the world about just this: stories of people's first encounters of the world of L. M. Montgomery and how her life, work, and legacy have changed their lives as readers/enthusiasts. We are writing a book proposal for this project so stay tuned to learn more about how the world of L. M. Montgomery forms young readers, and, indeed, fans of all ages⁸.

7. Is studying Montgomery's life also relevant to analyzing her books, or do we have to separate Montgomery's life from her books distinctively?

KS: Scholars have been very interested in the connections between her life and her work—this work has been informed by her life-writing. Early examples available to the public include Montgomery's letters to her Scottish penpal George Boyd MacMillan, *My Dear Mr. M: Letters to G.B. MacMillan from L. M. Montgomery* (edited by Elizabeth Epperly and Francis Bolger, 1980) and her journals (first edited by Elizabeth Waterstone and Mary Rubio, beginning in the 1980s). Montgomery's memoir, *The Alpine Path: The Story of My Career*, contains great material about her childhood. Montgomery was drawing on, and then transfiguring (we can't underestimate the importance of imagination), the people, places, and stories of her life in her writing. We get details from her life—Katie Maurice, the liniment in the cake, the haunted wood—in *Anne of Green Gables*, family histories in *The Story Girl*, her own story of coming of age as a writer in the *Emily* series. Scholars like

⁸ Learn more here: <<https://yourlmmstory.com/>>. Access on October 24, 2023.

Waterstone and Rubio as well as writer Jane Urquhart talk about how Montgomery takes unpleasant incidents in her life and transforms them in her fiction; in the fiction she finds joy and magic in life, lives vicariously through her characters, while the journals increasingly become a place to vent and grapple with the darker parts of her life, like mental health, marital, and parenting challenges. It's also important, and interesting, to remember that her life-writing is itself in some ways also a curated work of art, representing a particular point of view and possibly shaped for a public audience.

8. Given your understanding of L. M. Montgomery life, work, culture, and influence, and as the Chair of L. M. Montgomery Studies at the LMMI, what would you like to add, in this interview, about the author?

KS: I feel really honoured to be part of the Montgomery community. I get to meet and work with scholars from different disciplines—literature, modern languages, history, library studies, to name a few—as well as amazing scholars from outside the university. I work with people from tourism, heritage, different industries, related to Montgomery. And it's so exciting because you never know what new perspective you're going to hear about Montgomery. Recently I've been in touch with Barb Helander from the Canadian Bookbinders and Book Artists Guild. They've put out a call to their artists and binders to create books that honour Montgomery on her 150th birthday; I'm excited to see their beautiful creations. We usually have people from at least a dozen countries represented at our conference. I've been able to go to Japan to talk about Montgomery. Tatiane, you came here from Brazil to learn more about Montgomery.

It's like to end by inviting anyone with an interest in Montgomery to visit the *Journal of L. M. Montgomery Studies*⁹ to learn more about Montgomery and to come present at or attend our conference which can be done in person in beautiful Prince Edward Island, Montgomery's home and place of inspiration, or virtually¹⁰. We would love to see you in June 2024!

9. Thank you for accepting our invitation, answering our questions, and being interested in socializing L. M. Montgomery's production among Brazilian scholars! We also thank you for your constant support during Tatiane's research at the LMMI. Brazilian scholarship appreciates your work!

⁹ Available at: <<https://journaloflmmontgomerystudies.ca/>>. Access on October 24, 2023.

¹⁰ More information here: <<https://lmmontgomery.ca/>>. Access on October 24, 2023.

KS: My pleasure! It is an honour to have hosted Tatiane, to work with you both, and to build connections with Montgomery scholars and fans in Brazil. I look forward to developing more connections!

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