SCOPE FOR THE IMAGINATION: A LITERARY PILGRIMAGE TO THE LANDS OF LAURA INGALLS, PETER RABBIT, ANNE SHIRLEY, AND JO MARCH

by

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For my godparents, who introduced me to Laura, Peter, Anne, and Jo.

For my mother, who always believed in her woman of words.

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Introduction

"'Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents,'" mourns Jo March as she anticipates her family's wartime holiday in the first lines of *Little Women*. Though Jo seems focused on the material aspects of past holiday celebrations, the narrator's description of Jo, mere pages later, as "a girl who was rapidly shooting up into a woman and didn't like it" (13) suggests that the absence of Christmas presents is, for Jo, symbolic of the absence of Christmases—and childhood—past. Jo's disappointment captures a kind of yearning for the past and the comforts of home and childhood—in a word, *nostalgia*—that resonated with *Little Women's* first readers, Americans only three years removed from a devastating civil war. Five generations later, the nostalgia of *Little Women* still elicits powerful emotional responses from readers.

Little Women's continued impact on readers is evidenced by the millions of signatures in the guest books at Orchard House, the home in Concord, Massachusetts, where Louisa May Alcott wrote *Little Women*. Since the book's publication, readers have visited Orchard House in order to connect with their childhood or the author and characters who were so special to it. In fact, the house's conversion in 1912 from a dilapidated property to one of the United States' first house museums (Alcott Memorial Association) relied on shared, public nostalgia for idealized homes and childhoods. As Patricia West explains in her history of Orchard House Museum's development[1], "The language of the restoration campaign […] tellingly emphasizes issues such as the sanctity

of childhood and the influence of the home environment. The fact that 'the most beloved house in America' was 'falling to ruin' tapped into the fear that traditional home life itself was under siege" (67). The preservation of Orchard House provided a model for the preservation of other sites related to popular children's literature like Beatrix Potter's Hill Top Farm in England's Lake District, Green Gables Heritage Place in Prince Edward Island, Canada, and the Wilder family's many "little houses" across the American Midwest. In much the same way, *Little Women* was a model for the work of the respective authors related to those sites: Beatrix Potter, Lucy Maud (L.M.) Montgomery, and Laura Ingalls Wilder.

In times when few women owned or shaped property as men could, Alcott, Potter, Montgomery, and Wilder used their fiction to figuratively (and, in some occasions, literally) claim land of their own. Furthermore, each was so effective in claiming her territory that whole economies or, at the very least, the work of memorial societies, national heritage foundations, and tourism boards are devoted to celebrating how these women fostered readers' connections to those lands. My hybrid creative and critical study attempts to explain why these destinations continue to attract so many impassioned visitors. If, as Nicola Watson suggests, "no author or text can be successfully located to place unless their writings model or cue tourism in one way or another" (*The Literary Tourist* 12), how does the work of these women prompt readers to travel to their homes, graves, and the inspirations for their imaginary landscapes? While the critical portion of my thesis seeks to answer questions about how literature inspires pilgrimage, the travel memoir throughout which my critical analysis is woven asks why these authors and their

books have compelled *me* to make literary pilgrimages to Pepin, Hill Top Farm, Prince Edward Island, and Concord.

One motivating factor for readers' pilgrimages to the little houses, Hill Top, Green Gables, and Orchard House may indeed be nostalgia, the force that endeared *Little Women* to so many of its early readers. In the introduction to *The Literary Tourist*, her in-depth study of literary tourism's origins and rituals, Nicola Watson describes a trip she and her daughter, Elizabeth, took to the Lake District, the region that inspired not only Beatrix Potter's animal tales but also Arthur Ransome's adventure series *Swallows and Amazons*. While Watson delights in seeing the places in Ransome's books brought to life, Elizabeth is nonplussed. The question Elizabeth seems to ask is, "why did you need to visit the island, when you had the real thing, the book" (2)? Elizabeth's reaction prompts Watson to recollect her own childhood reading experiences. She remembers how, as a child, she did not have any interest in visiting the places where her favorite books were set, nor did she bother to explore whether those places were real or not. These observations and recollections lead Watson to conclude that literary tourism "remains a deeply counter-intuitive response to the pleasures and possibilities of imaginative reading" (1) and that "[t]his visiting of places with literary associations is essentially an adult vice, obscure in its impulse" (2).

But are those impulses really so obscure? Comparing Elizabeth's and Nicola's reactions to the Lake District's version of *Swallows and Amazons* country leads one to recognize that Watson's visit is an attempt to reclaim something she has lost that her daughter still possesses: a childlike certainty in the reality of fiction. Though Watson's

study occupies itself with the origins and motivations of literary tourism to places associated with authors of adult literature, her anecdote about visiting a site related to children's literature suggests that such tourism related to books read in childhood is perhaps more like pilgrimage—a journey undertaken with the hope of spiritual growth and change—that is motivated by a restorative nostalgia.

To illustrate the relationship between nostalgia, pilgrimage, and literature, one can return to Louisa May Alcott and *Little Women*. When first commissioned by Roberts Brothers publishing to write "a *girls' story*," Louisa May Alcott was skeptical of the book's possible success. She wrote in her journal in May 1868, "Never liked girls or knew many, except my sisters; but our queer plays and experiences may prove interesting, though I doubt it" (*Journals* 166). Alcott need not have doubted herself. *Little Women* was a resounding success, perhaps because Alcott's preservation of her favorite childhood moments satisfied readers' desires to do the same. By using her novel to revisit her childhood and revive beloved family members[2], Alcott evoked a nation-wide longing for a not-so-distant past and inspired an entire genre of nostalgic, autobiographical fiction for young people.

As Sarah Elbert notes in her study of Alcott's life and work, *A Hunger for Home: Louisa May Alcott's Place in American Culture*, *Little Women* was followed by "imitators" like *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, the Pollyanna stories, and the Bobbsey Twins series (198). To that list, I would add Wilder's *Little House* series and Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* and its sequels. These series all follow the "unique model" (199) of *Little Women*, which, as Elbert describes, combines the formulaic plot of

the sentimental novel—a protagonist thrust into the difficult world who must learn to survive and grows spiritually and intellectually in the process—with the Romantic tradition of children as "wellsprings of creativity" (Elbert 198). The March sisters demonstrate such creativity in their Pickwick Society newspaper and parlor theatricals, Laura Ingalls pretends to be a wild animal as she romps in the prairie grasses, and few readers can forget Anne Shirley's ill-fated re-enactment of the funeral of Lady Elaine from Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* during which the vessel meant to carry Anne, as the late Lady Elaine, begins to sink. According to Elbert's central argument about the Romantic child, Jo's, Laura's, and Anne's creativity enables them to resist conforming to traditional social roles or constructs as adults. In a similar way, Beatrix Potter's creativity—her art and her writing in her animal fables—freed her from the confines of her parents' strict society. Elbert says that, by recording her childhood in writing near the end of *Little Women*, Jo preserves and therefore retains her "authentic self." Thus, adult readers who struggle with society's and adulthood's threats to the authentic selves forged in childhood return to *Little Women* and the other series discussed in this study in an effort to learn how to recreate or revisit their own "authentic selves" (199), the people they were when they first read *Little Women*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *Little House in the Big Woods*, or *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*[3].

Louisa May Alcott's Jo March, L.M. Montgomery's Anne Shirley, and Laura Ingalls Wilder's Laura, like their creators, all grow up to become writers who preserve their childhoods in their fiction. In doing so, these characters maintain an unconventional individuality that is the stuff of both readers' and the writers' fantasies. None of the

writers whose work I explore here were as free from the bonds of convention or as graced by good fortune and strong families as their characters. In *Little Women,* the *Anne* books, and the *Little House* series, Alcott, Montgomery, and Wilder use their childhoods as models for their stories, but manage to revise their pasts in their fiction. Alcott, for example, allows the March sisters to grow up in one house, though she and her family lived a somewhat nomadic life until Louisa was almost thirty. Montgomery softens the hard edges of her lonely childhood by making orphan Anne Shirley the center of her new community. Laura Ingalls Wilder rearranges the events in her family's journey to the West in order to omit her brother's death and her father's many failures. Furthermore, though Beatrix Potter's stories occupy a different subgenre of juvenile literature—the animal fable or picture book—and reach a younger audience than the other writers' works, she follows a similar pattern in her craft. Her illustrations depict favorite places from her childhood, and her characters, based on favorite childhood pets and neighbors' animals, enjoy the personal independence that her strict upper-class upbringing never allowed. By transforming past psychological pain into fictional triumph, all of these writers' works elevate nostalgia—the longing for an idealized home and childhood—from a regressive state to a progressive one.

The work of these writers seems to presage a trend in contemporary women's fiction observed by Roberta Rubenstein in her study, *Home Matters: Longing and Belonging, Nostalgia and Mourning in Women's Fiction*. Rubenstein contradicts conventional perceptions of nostalgia as a regressive, static state to suggest that contemporary women writers

> evoke nostalgia […] to enable characters (and, imaginatively, their readers) to confront, mourn, and figuratively revise their relation to something has been lost, whether in the world or in themselves. Through it, they may move beyond nostalgia's initially regressive pull to override, neutralize, or transmute loss and achieve a new level of awareness. Narratives that engage notions of home, loss, and/or nostalgia confront the past in order to 'fix' it […] to *secure* it more firmly in the imagination and also to *correct*—as in *revise* or *repair*—it. (Rubenstein 6)

In confronting their pasts, Alcott, Montgomery, and Wilder create idealized ones by using their fiction to revise and revive the people, places, and attitudes they may have loved and lost, and the writers' biographies suggest that, like the characters discussed in Rubenstein's study, their psyches were both tested and soothed by this process[4].

However, by engaging nostalgia to re-fashion their pasts into ideal fictions for their characters, these writers elicit an even more powerful nostalgia from their grown-up readers, a sort of exponential longing not only for the worlds of the books but also for the childhoods during which readers first encountered those books. To try to cope with this longing, readers may, as Elbert describes, "travel backward to recover toys in the attic, precious objects that have been mislaid or put away over the years" (199) or, in more dramatic fashion, they try to visit the landscapes and places that were so important to their childhoods. They browse maps, board planes, book hotels, and buy tickets to tour houses or take in special views. In short, they engage in literary pilgrimage.

I categorize literary travel inspired by nostalgia as *pilgrimage* because pilgrimage, like Rubenstein's idea of nostalgia, is an attempt to reach a new awareness through

journey-making. In the case of nostalgia, the journey is internal and psychological. Pilgrimage, on the other hand, while an intimately spiritual journey, involves a physical relocation. Pilgrimage is, as anthropologist Victor Turner describes, "exteriorized mysticism" (7), a physical journey to a far, holy place taken in an effort to connect more deeply to the divine, make penance, and heal the soul.

Drawing on turn-of-the-century ethnographer and folklorist Arthur Van Gennep's study of *rites de passage*, Turner likens religious pilgrimage to a tribal rite of passage, in that a pilgrim experiences *separation*, a departure from her society, followed by *liminality*, a suspension of societal rules and expectations "betwixt and between all familiar lines of classification" wherein pilgrims who were once strangers to each other bond in shared experience or *communitas*. Finally, the pilgrim reaches her destination, or encounters the sacred, and faces *reintegration*, a return to society where she is expected to follow customary rules and obligations but perhaps at a higher status (Turner 2). To better understand Turner's theory, one need only think of Chaucer's pilgrims, who separate themselves from the rigid rules of their medieval class system by traveling to Canterbury together. In the liminal space of the road to Canterbury, personalities as varied as a knight, a prioress, a friar, a merchant, a miller, a cleric, and a cook (among others) interact in ways they would never attempt outside of the context of a pilgrimage. Readers must presume that, after returning to the Tabard Inn following their visit to Becket's shrine, the pilgrims will not see each other again and will resume the duties and lifestyle of their classes, perhaps with some higher purpose in mind, given their shared

religious experience and the appeal of the parson's humble, reverent prologue that concludes the tales as readers know them.

In applying Van Gennep's theories of *rites de passage* to pilgrimage, however, Turner develops one important distinction. Turner suggests that pilgrimage, though it follows the structural patterns of a rite of passage, is, unlike many tribal rites of passage, a voluntary practice. Though pilgrimage is an important component to some faiths (for example, the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca or even Mormon missions), because pilgrimage is not "an obligatory social mechanism to mark the transition of an individual or group from one state or status to another within the mundane sphere" pilgrimage is not liminal, but rather "'liminoid'" an ambiguous sphere entered by choice (Turner 35). Turner's revision of Van Gennep's theories allows sociologists to apply his processual approach to pilgrimage in their analyses of the liminoid realm of tourism.

If tourism and pilgrimage follow relatively the same process, what, then, separates literary tourism from literary pilgrimage? In his *Image and the Pilgrimage in Christian Culture,* Turner describes how "At the end [of a pilgrimage] the pilgrim […] is exposed to powerful religious sacra (shrines, images, liturgies, curative waters, ritual circumambulations of holy objects, and so on) the beneficial effect of which depends upon the zeal and pertinacity of his quest" (8). The "sacra" of a literary pilgrimage are writers' graves, homes, and favorite objects or landscapes. These literary "sacra" are, like the objects of a Christian pilgrimage, available for any visitor to see, or, as Turner describes it, "exposed to the view of pilgrims and ordinary believers alike" (8). If what distinguishes Christian pilgrimage from ordinary travel is "the zeal and pertinacity of the

quest" and "the inward movement of the heart" (8) felt at its conclusion, then what separates literary tourism from literary pilgrimage is the traveler's passion or sense of yearning for the object of the quest and her status upon reintegration. A literary traveler motivated by nostalgia seeks to be moved. Like the penitent pilgrim who approaches a shrine in order to receive forgiveness and healing, she seeks out the places most significant to her past in an effort to be her best self.

For most of its history, nostalgia was regarded as a physical ailment related to geographical or spatial relationships. As Aaron Santesso explains in *Careful Longing: The Poetics and Problems of Nostalgia*, his study of seventeenth-and eighteenth-century nostalgia poetry, in 1688 physician Johannes Hofer combined the Greek words *nostos* (return home) and *algia* (painful condition) to describe longing for one's native land that he saw manifested in the body of a patient; as Santesso records, ship's captains in the 1700s observed similar phenomena in their crew and believed that the long separation from their native land made crew members sluggish and lethargic (13). Santesso argues that, not until the Romantic period did people, particularly writers, begin to recognize nostalgia as a psychological condition (18). It is interesting, then, that at the same time as Romantic poets were exploring the psychological nature of nostalgia, they were also making what seventeenth-century doctors might have deemed a cure for the physical disease of nostalgia: journeys back to the "native lands"—be they graves, homes, or landscapes—of the geniuses who inspired them.

Two recent books, Watson's *The Literary Tourist* and Paul Westover's *Necromanticism*, explore the causes and effects of literary tourism in the eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries[5]. Romantics celebrated the power of the human imagination and believed that genius existed in the artist rather than some divine muse. Thus, Westover explains, literary tourism (travel associated with authors' real or "fictive" worlds) was popular among Romantics because it "recreates the Romantic author as a genius loci that permeates both tangible and imaginary places and authorizes the links between them" (*Necromanticism* 4). The popularity of literary tourism and pilgrimage was the result of an intersection of two powerful cultural anxieties. The Romantic period witnessed a shift in "deathways," wherein cemeteries were moved to the outskirts of town and more regimented mourning practices were observed such that a wider gap was created between the dead and the living (*Necromanticism* 6). At the same time, print technology was rapidly improving, which made it easier to mass-produce texts and more difficult for readers to feel a special intimacy with authors. Literary pilgrims of the Romantic period, then, tried to close the gaps between the living and the dead, the reader and the author, by going to meet the author at his or her grave or, in later years, at his or her home with the help of a letter of introduction.

Westover argues that Romantics' literary travel was a search for "ideal presence," the Scottish Enlightenment critic Henry Home, Lord Kames's term for "the powerful sense that remembering and imagining the dead brings them close" (11). According to Westover's analysis, ideal presence was a sensation these travelers first experienced while *reading* a text. Westover describes how, in Kames's theory of ideal presence and the psychology of reading, "literature derives power from its ability to convince readers that they are *present* in the book world […] feeling imaginary incidents on their pulses"

(18). In addition, as Westover paraphrases Kames's theories:

> […Ideal presence] establish[es] sympathetic connections between readers and others.
>
> According to Kames, people sympathize most strongly with those who draw near to them. Reading obliterates distance; books can mentally transport readers into the presence of any person, transcending time and place. The resulting imaginative and affective nearness, acting on readers just like actual proximity, generates interpersonal bonds with the author and also with imaginary characters. [...] Ideal presence allows the dead to speak to us as if living still.
>
> (*Necromanticism* 18)

Literary landmarks, then, since they were connected either to the body of the author/genius or the powerful experience of reading itself, were places especially charged with the energy of a writer and his or characters and thus desirably apt for experiencing ideal presence.

As the creative portion of this thesis attests, my literary pilgrimage is also motivated by the search for ideal presence. In 2000, when I was fifteen years old, I lost my mother to breast cancer. For the next ten years, my childhood home was the place of her ideal presence. When my father and stepmother left that home in 2012, I was forced to find another place or another means of locating my mother's "ideal presence." As I have recognized upon reflection and recorded in this thesis, my search for the ideal presence of four writers from my childhood may also have been an attempt to find my mother again.

Nineteenth-century travelers' increased interest in ideal presence is evidenced by the shift in public opinion against Westminster Abbey, one of the first literary destinations in what could be called the capital of literary tourism: London, England. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the primary destination for Anglophone wanderers was the Abbey's Poets' Corner, an eighteenth-century nationalistic effort to gather all of England's great writers in the country's cultural center (*Literary Tourist* 26). However, as more and more memorials unattached to writers' remains were added, Poets' Corner became a confusing conglomeration of monuments and graves that left nineteenth-century visitors feeling cheated[6]. To nineteenth-century visitors influenced by Romantic notions of places "organically connected both to the physical person and to the literary corpus" (31) Westminster Abbey suddenly seemed "too public, too crowded, too comprehensive to foster the reverent intimacies of sentimental pilgrimage" (31). Thus, Victorian readers and tourists, perhaps influenced by the Romantic poets' notion of the domestic space as "where the great man's authentic self would indeed be found" (North 51), first sought out the far-flung graves of writers like Shakespeare, Keats, and Shelley, which were located in places more authentically or intimately connected to the writers like their hometowns or places of death. Gravesite tourism then led to exploration of writers' birthplaces ("to mark the imagined harmony between author and native soil" (*Literary Tourist* 55)) and, finally, writers' houses, "the workshop[s] of genius" (90).

Unfortunately, the growing popularity of literary tourism and the sentiment that motivated travelers to participate in it often led to the construction of "charged" literary landmarks rather than their organic evolution. In fact, the image of the writer's house as a

workshop of genius is one that was a construct of the novelist Sir Walter Scott. Scott, whose Waverley novels and other works of historical fiction like *Kenilworth* inspired visitors to travel to the highlands and tour Tudor ruins, embraced the nineteenth-century reader's interest in the life of a writer, a trend that was fostered by the emerging genre of literary biography, books that focused on writers and their relationships to their work which often offered imaginary "tours" of the writer's houses[7]. From 1811 to 1824, Scott renovated a farmhouse, his second home, into "the first house consciously designed by a writer to display the income and status derived from authorship" (*Literary Tourist* 91). As Erin Hazard describes in "The Author's House: Abbotsford and The Wayside[8]," Abbotsford was "a historicist fantasy" (64) a home whose architecture recalled the mythical, romantic Scotland fashioned by Scott in his novels.

Guests who visited Abbotsford both during and after Scott's lifetime were treated to views of landscapes that seemed transported from one of Scott's romances, and tours of the house featured objects significant to Scott's characters, like "'a gun which belonged to Rob Roy'" (*Literary Tourist* 98), and "the keys and door of 'the heart of Midlothian'" (99). What most visitors would not have known was that Scott's acquisition of his antiquities often preceded the stories he wrote about them. Scott's construction and furnishing of Abbotsford seemed entirely influenced by how he imagined readers perceived the home and life of a writer. Abbotsford was as much a fiction as any of its inhabitant's novels, a "meta-narrative derived from and referencing material things" (99).[9]

Though Sir Walter Scott lived and wrote much earlier than the authors in this study, his influence is keenly felt in the works of and sites related to the four authors at the heart of my thesis. Scott was a favorite of all four women. Abba Alcott read *Kenilworth* to her daughters as they sewed (*Journals* 13) just as Marmee reads Scott's novels to the March sisters in *Little Women* (*Little Women* 65). Beatrix Potter claimed she taught herself to read with Scott's *Waverley* novels (Lear 35), and her journals are populated with allusions to Scott's characters and plots. In her unpublished memoir, Laura Ingalls Wilder recalled stumbling upon a book of Scott's poems meant to be a present from her parents (though the author was changed to Tennyson in *Little Town on the Prairie*, most likely for thematic purposes) (Fellman 107). Lucy Maud Montgomery delighted in touring Scott country on her honeymoon almost as much as Anne Shirley delights in reading (and quoting) Scott's romances (Barry 458) throughout the *Anne* series. Scott's ubiquitous presence in the lives and work of these women suggests that all were aware of (and perhaps attracted to) the powerful connections that can be formed between author, story, and place.

Scott wrote nostalgic romances that shaped readers' understanding of Scotland and its history; similarly, the works of Alcott, Potter, Wilder, and Montgomery both employ and evoke nostalgia for childhood and specific periods in American, British, and Canadian history.[1] Furthermore, in the same way that Scott's novels influenced the style and content of these women's books, Scott's deliberately constructed "writer's home"

[1] Case in point: at a recent dinner out with friends from work, Jennie, a fellow teacher, told another colleague, Caitlin about how she processed her own meat from a deer her husband had shot. "That's so Laura Ingalls!" Caitlin replied, awed that Jennie could perform a ritual that most people used decades-old technology to complete.

laid the foundation for places like Orchard House, where the Louisa May Alcott Memorial Society has made Alcott's bedroom a shrine to the author as well as her characters, and Hill Top Farm, which has been frozen in time according to the strict and detailed instructions of Beatrix Potter herself. In the 1930s, Canada's National Park Service transformed the nondescript farmhouse in Cavendish that was the model for Montgomery's Green Gables into Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert's home by adding objects and details that conjure scenes from the *Anne* novels to the house's rooms[10]. Similarly, most of the "little house" museums are reconstructions of the homes built on what historians believe to be the Ingalls' claim sites, but they often display significant objects from the series that are incongruent with that homestead's place in the novels' progression or the author's chronology[11].

The constructed nature of Orchard House, Hill Top, Green Gables, and the little houses would seem to negate their role as relics or shrines worthy of literary pilgrimage, but Chaucer himself acknowledged the fakery associated with divine quest. In these places' attempts to recreate the idealized landscapes of generations of children, they are nostalgia incarnate, the longing for an unreachable time and place made manifest. The power of these places, then, depends on the pilgrim's "inward movement of the heart," a stirring that is, as I have discovered, often more strongly provoked by the liminality of the journey than the reality of the destination. As will be demonstrated in the memoir portions of my thesis, the experience of many of these places is bittersweet, but the journeys made to those places provide ample opportunities for reflection and growth.

As Paul Westover explains, there is a tension between "the desire for imaginative revival of the past and the demand for empirical evidence" (*Necromanticism* 50) at the heart of Romanticism and literary pilgrimage. The nostalgic literary pilgrim seeks connection with the ideal world of a novel and the Romantic with the ideal genius of a writer, but both require a material landscape or significant object to conjure such relationships. As a result, neither the ideal nor the material satisfies; the material is a reminder of the author's absence or the landscape's fictitiousness, and the connection to the ideal is tempered by the recognition of its incorporeal, and thus impermanent, state. Recognizing this imperfect state of being is equivalent to coming of age, the driving force behind the stories that bring readers to Orchard House, Hill Top, Green Gables, and the little houses in the first place. At some point in each of their stories, Laura Ingalls, Peter Rabbit, Anne Shirley, and Jo March learn that childhood is fleeting and does not last forever, yet adults return to these books and travel to the places that inspired them because they long for and hope to reconnect with their childhoods. But pilgrims cannot live at the little house, Hill Top, Green Gables or Orchard House; their travels, like childhood, are temporary. Perhaps, in that bittersweet moment of dissonance, when pilgrims like me "come of age" in the place where our favorite characters did the same, we finally achieve the unity of past and present for which we have been searching. We return—like Jo, Peter, Anne, and Laura before us—changed.

In all of the books I will discuss, characters take physical journeys to new places while experiencing spiritual journeys to maturity, to family, or to the unexplored corners of their hearts. Reading about those journeys set me on a journey of my own; traveling

with these characters made me want to travel to the places where they walked or explored or were created. This thesis is the record of that journey; it is an exploration of how and why texts cue readers like me to make physical journeys, and it is a memoir of the personal epiphanies that result from literary pilgrimage.

I have organized my thesis to follow the rhythms of Turner's rites of passage in a pilgrimage. I begin with Laura Ingalls Wilder and the Little House Wayside in Pepin, Wisconsin, since the *Little House* series is a celebration of home, and my trip to Pepin reminds me of the home and childhood from which life has separated me. Trips to Sawrey, England, and Prince Edward Island, Canada, offer an opportunity to contemplate the effects of liminality and *communitas* on authors Potter and Montgomery, their characters, and me, their reader. Finally, two visits to Louisa May Alcott's family homes in Concord, Massachusetts, prompt reflection on the challenge—both the difficulty and the great potential—of reintegration. Throughout this hybrid study, I am a double-agent of sorts: a critic who will examine a place as text itself and a writer who will communicate, as so many writers have before, how a place can influence one's craft and transform her heart.

CHAPTER I

PEPIN, WISCONSIN: "That Was the Best Time of All"

The gas gauge was reading perilously close to the wrong side of "E," so I pulled over at a lonely gas station. I slowly rolled my little red Hyundai Accent up to the single pump and stepped outside to fill the tank. It felt right, somehow, to stop for gas in a place called Rock Creek, a place with a natural name, a rugged name like the places in the books that had inspired this journey.

I was on my way to visit the Little House Wayside and the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum in Pepin, Wisconsin. Already the four-hour trek from the bustling, eastern suburbs of Green Bay to the "Big Woods" of Pepin on the opposite side of the state was feeling like a journey back in time. Once I had driven west of Eau Claire, the four-lane highway lined by strip malls and super-sized gas "oases" gave way to quiet, two-lane State Highway Trunk 85, a winding road edged by dense forests and fields filled with just-sprouting corn. I drove through unincorporated towns in mere seconds, barely registering them before they disappeared behind more trees and fields. It was easy to imagine that beneath the farmhouses in the distance or even this one-pump gas station was the dust of some pioneer's homestead claim.

"What's it like to live out here?" I had wondered aloud, thinking that I would grow bored of the rural life quickly.

Yet I knew that the rhythms of life in western Wisconsin couldn't be so different from those in the eastern part of the state. Somewhere in these towns, there were high school teachers like me who had just finished their school year and were making travel plans or curling up with library books. Parents were working or running errands. Children were playing in summer soccer leagues or going to camp, or maybe they were spending their summers like I used to, traipsing around their yards in their mothers' old dresses and their fathers' old coats, making plans to "go west" like the Family Ingalls.

I spent so many elementary school summers running through a small clearing in the tall bushes that separated my yard from the neighbors' property. My brother Kris would trail behind me and wait for me to knock on the back door to "call" for my best summer friend, Amy, and her older brother, Matt. Then, the four of us would prepare for the day's "journey." Amy and I would pack old suitcases full of dress-up clothes and plastic food from our Fisher-Price kitchens while Matt and Kris would "hitch up" the wagons. They would wrap bungee cords around the black handles of our Radio Flyers to make a three-wagon train, and then, when he was sure neither of our moms were watching, Matt would take a kid-sized lawn chair from his garage and fit it snugly into the front wagon to make a spring seat from which he could drive our poor "ox," his older brother, Andy.

All four of us would pile into the wagons; Matt and Kris sat in the front, Amy and I sat in the middle, and our suitcases rested in the last wagon, where they were occasionally guarded by our youngest siblings when they wanted in on the fun. Andy would pull us back and forth along the sidewalk in front of his family's house, taking

care to walk us slowly through neighbors' sprinklers on hot days. When we wanted a break, we would leave the wagons in the driveway, throw off the cotton dresses and corduroy vests that covered our swimsuits, and jump into Amy and Matt's backyard pool, which we re-imagined as a welcome creek or spring that we had discovered on our journey to the West.

Those summer journeys in our makeshift wagons were, for Kris and Matt, mostly a re-enactment of *Oregon Trail,* the computer game about American pioneers that our families often played together on rainy days, but Amy and I were always thinking about Laura Ingalls Wilder and her *Little House* books as we made camp and cooked plastic meals or waded in the "creek" of the swimming pool.

Laura Ingalls Wilder's novels of her pioneer girlhood captured our imaginations. I raced through the series in the first few years of elementary school, and Amy read the books along with her family. Sometimes, after a sleepover, we would watch morning reruns of the 1970s *Little House on the Prairie* TV series, and during one summer, Amy and I even attended a Pioneer Day at a local historical site. We wore our hair in pigtail braids and put on our moms' best approximations of calico dresses and starched white aprons. We carried our lunches in tin pails and kicked up the dust of the museum's gravel trails with our shiny, black, button-up boots.

The spirit of those childhood memories was present as I topped off my tank and allowed myself the silly notion of thinking I was some modern-day Pa Ingalls, just "watering the horses" for the next leg of the journey. I had already dressed the part of a

pioneer that morning, taking care to wear a new chambray shirt with a light print that reminded me of the blouses Laura might have worn tucked into a patched skirt for a day of work on her family's claim. Why not just let my imagination run as free as it had when I was small?

My active imagination may have been what had kept me from visiting Pepin sooner. The *Little House* books were some of the first novels I read, and they provided some of the most vivid reading experiences of my life. I had known for a long time that Laura Ingalls Wilder was a Wisconsin girl like me, and I had had the means to visit the site of her family's home in Pepin on my own for several years. Why was I first visiting the house now, in my late twenties? Why had it taken a major academic endeavor to finally make me go?

I was not the only *Little House* fan asking herself that question. Two years before I made my trip to Pepin, children's book editor Wendy McClure published her account of visiting all of the *Little House* sites in a memoir called *The Wilder Life*. I had heard about the book on NPR and, after getting over my initial jealousy (McClure had been to all the *Little House* sites *and* she had written a memoir about literary tourism? Was she READING MY MIND?), I knew immediately what I would buy Amy for her twenty-fifth birthday. Then, I bought a copy for myself.

In her introduction to *The Wilder Life*, McClure explains the accessibility of "Laura World," despite its remote and far-flung homesteads, shanties, and sod houses:

> […]unlike those wholly fictional realms, the "Laura World," as I'd come to think of it, was a little more permeable. It shared space with the actual past, so things

> from it could make their way into my world, where I would look for them everywhere. No doubt it helped that countless family restaurants and steak emporiums of my 1970s suburban childhood went for rustic, antique-strewn decorating themes, with knickknack shelves full of tin cups and assorted old-timey crap. It didn't take much more than, say, the sight of a dusty glass oil lamp on the wall above a booth at a suburban Bonanza to make me feel like I was communing with Laura while I ate my cottage fries. (3)

Like McClure, who could conjure "Laura's World" at the sight of one antique knickknack, when I was young, I saw "Laura World" in any museum my family visited or whatever dusty, prairie-like vista I spotted from my window seat on family road trips. Laura and her family lived mere miles away from the towns I saw depicted in television westerns and *Hallmark Hall of Fame* movies. For McClure, for me, and for many fans of the series, Laura was a part of a universal past; she seemed to be at home wherever a butter churn rested in a corner or a squeaking cast-iron kitchen tool awaited some docent's demonstration, so we did not feel the need to look for her. In fact, I remember being jarred by learning (relatively recently) the exact years of the Ingallses' adventures. For so long, Laura simply existed in some generic past, a wide swath of the 1800s that seemed very separate from the Civil War, though Laura Ingalls had in fact been born only two years after the war ended.

Because McClure had covered *Little House* tourism so thoroughly in her memoir, I was reluctant to include a *Little House* destination on my own research itinerary, but I would be remiss to ignore the "local girl" when writing about the formative novels of my

youth. So I planned a pilgrimage to Pepin and the Little House in the Big Woods, one that would take on even greater significance once I arrived.

When the series was first published in the 1930s, *Little House* readers believed that the story told in the series *was* the autobiography of Laura Ingalls Wilder; they accepted as truth the chronology of the tales and the exploits of all of its characters. Scholarship of the last forty years, however, has revealed that the *Little House* books are carefully crafted works of fiction based in fact. The series tells the story of the Ingalls family—Charles "Pa" Ingalls, Caroline "Ma" Ingalls, and their daughters Mary, Laura, Carrie, and Grace, all of whom are based on Laura Ingalls Wilder's parents and siblings—and is told in a third-person limited narrative with Laura as the center of consciousness. *Little House in the Big Woods*, the first book in the series, is about the Ingallses' daily lives in the woods near Pepin, Wisconsin. Neighboring family visit for Christmas and maple syrup-making parties, and Laura and Mary marvel at their parents' work while also performing chores of their own and learning little life lessons about sharing, faith, good neighborliness, and how to live safely in the wilderness. The subsequent novels[12] in the series follow the Ingalls family as they move about the United States, from Kansas to Minnesota, and finally settle in De Smet, South Dakota, the eponymous *Little Town on the Prairie*. The series ends with *These Happy Golden Years*, in which Laura marries Almanzo, another homesteader in De Smet. The book concludes after she enjoys her first supper as a married woman in her new home.[13]

Readers of Donald Zochert's *Laura*, the first complete Wilder biography, or Pamela Smith Hill's more recent *Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Writer's Life* know that the Ingalls family's story was not as consistent a journey west nor as triumphantly independent as Wilder's series suggests. In reality, the Ingallses moved to Kansas in 1869 when Laura was just two years old, but they moved back to Wisconsin from "Indian Territory" in 1871 for financial reasons. The man who had purchased their house in Wisconsin was unable to keep up with payments, so the family moved back into the Pepin log cabin and lived among family, providing the memories Wilder recollects in *Big Woods*. In 1874, the family moved to Walnut Grove, Minnesota, where their crops were indeed plagued by grasshoppers, so in 1876, Charles Ingalls decided to move the family to Burr Oak, Iowa, where he managed a hotel for a friend from their parish. Burr Oak is never mentioned in the *Little House* series, perhaps, as Hill theorizes, because the incidents surrounding the move to and settlement in Iowa—the death of the Ingallses' infant son, Freddie, the rabblerousing exploits of hotel patrons, and Charles Ingalls's inability to pay his debts, which led to a middle-of-the-night run from town—"would have undercut the overarching theme of moving west which binds the Little House books together. The fictional Ingalls family always looks forward, not back" (Hill 30). From Burr Oak, the Ingallses moved back to Minnesota and then, with the help of Laura's Aunt Docia and her family, followed the railroad workers to De Smet, South Dakota, where the family's story proceeded much as it does in *The Long Winter*, the sixth book in the series, and its sequels.

As I began to re-read the *Little House* books, it occurred to me that the memories I shared whenever friends and I reminisced about the series were mostly from *Little House in the Big Woods*. Sure, I marveled over the strangeness of the grasshopper plague in *On the Banks of Plum Creek* and shook my head at the sad events that open *By the Shores of Silver Lake*. I cringed over the family invading Osage tribal land in *Little House on the Prairie*. I watched actors in a musical version of the series re-enact Almanzo's snowy sleigh ride courtship of Laura from *These Happy Golden Years*, and I still felt giddy. I remembered the romantic and melodramatic dangers like seven-month blizzards and panther attacks that threatened on every page of the *Little House* series, and I knew those dangers fueled the intensity and fervor with which my friends and I read the books, but my strongest, most abiding sense-memories came from inside the little house; whenever I thought about the series, I thought about food.

Little House in the Big Woods was the first of very few books in my life that had a smell and a taste. As I read on the rag-rug or at my desk in Mrs. Bucholz's first grade classroom, I felt enveloped by the Ingallses' kitchen. It was alive with smells, sights and sounds: fatty meats made the air salty and smoky, steam poured out of stew pots, fires crackled in the cook stove, and golden-brown bread rose in the oven. And then there was snow candy. I vividly remember reading about Mary and Laura getting ready for Christmas with their extended family by pouring hot molasses syrup over fresh snow that Pa has collected in their "patty pans" to make frozen curlicues of candy. That first grade winter was a snowy one, and I remember thinking how wonderful it would have been to

make snow candy. The whole process was both magical and practical, like everything else in *Little House in the Big Woods*.

The voice of the narrator, especially in the first few *Little House* books, was so plainspoken and matter-of-fact that even the description of hog-butchering in the first chapter of *Big Woods* was re-assuring. The daily activities of pioneer life were described so clearly that I felt like I could do those things, too. And if I couldn't build and cook like Pa and Ma did, then at least I knew *why* they were doing it. Every task was carefully explained by Wilder and Lane. When I went to museums, I didn't have to ask about strange objects in kitchens or barns; I knew how a cheese hoop worked or what a powder horn held. I knew about which kind of snow meant it was sugaring time and which ingredients made a Johnny Cake. Today, scholars suggest that Wilder and Lane may have included these details to emphasize the Ingallses' efficacy and self-sufficiency, a trait that in turn supported Lane's Libertarian political leanings, but perhaps the homespun wisdom and pride in self-sufficiency emitted by the narrator's descriptions of hog-butchering, butter-churning, cheese-making, and Johnny Cake-baking is what made Amy and me so certain that, if we really wanted to, we could live like Laura Ingalls in our own backyards.

I also think I liked reading about food in the *Little House* books because the meals and their preparations reminded me of home. Like Laura's house in the Big Woods, my house was always full of good kitchen smells. In fact, Andy, Amy and Matt's older brother (and our long-suffering 'ox') used to come home begging his mom, Ruthie, to make her house "smell like Lisa's," like my mom's kitchen. What Andy usually smelled

was garlic, the seasoning on the bread or in the meatballs and sauce that Mom was making as part of that week's Italian meal. If the house didn't smell like garlic, it usually smelled like some kind of baked good: Nestle's chocolate chip cookies; thin, snowflake-like *pizzelles*; soft, sweet banana bread; warm, chocolatey brownies.

When I read about Laura helping Ma and Mary get the house ready for Christmas, I thought about the winter evenings I spent decorating cookies with my brothers at our kitchen table. In *The Little House in the Big Woods*:

> Ma was busy all day long, cooking good things for Christmas. She baked salt-rising bread and rye-n-Injun bread, and Swedish crackers, and a huge pan of baked beans, with salt pork and molasses. She baked vinegar pies and dried-apple pies, and filled a big jar with cookies, and she let Laura and Mary lick the cake spoon. (63)

In my house, Dad would frost the cookies and put them on trays for my brothers and me to decorate while Mom took ball after ball of cellophane-wrapped dough from the fridge and rolled it out in thick slabs on a countertop she had dusted with flour. Then, she gently pressed heirloom cookie cutters into the dough to make bells and reindeer and angels. As we poured colored sugar, rainbow jimmies, and Red Hots onto frosted toy soldiers and Christmas trees, my brothers and I would laugh and flex icing-caked fingers at each other like they were witches' claws. Peter, Paul and Mary sang carols on the stereo, my cheeks grew pink in the smoky warmth of the living room fireplace, my tongue hummed with the sweetness of butter cookies and icing, and everything I needed was around that kitchen table. Every *Little House* book had a Christmas scene, and even though some of the

Ingallses' Christmases were bleak, there were, like the Christmas in the Big Woods, always small gifts or treats that made the day special, and preparations always involved the whole family, just like at my house.

At school, I needed reminders of home. When first grade began, I had been so excited to go to school for a full day, but by the middle of the year, I had developed terrible homesickness. I felt a sadness I couldn't explain in the early afternoons; I was so eager to get back home. I wrote a story about a duck that got lost and pined for his mother and another about an alien who flew too far from home. Troubled by my afternoon tears and melodramatic tales, Mrs. Bucholz called home and suggested that my mom send a note or a token to school with me, something that could remind me that I would be back with her soon. Mom took a note card from her stationery drawer and used an Elmer's glue stick to paste a small photo of herself on the back. In blue ink, she wrote in her loopy, happy handwriting about how much she and Dad loved me and how I would be home soon. She wrote that I should do my best to have fun in school. Then, she took clear contact paper and laminated the card before tucking it into my backpack. Throughout the school day, I kept Mom's card in my pocket. Sometimes, I would take the card out to feel its smooth laminated surface. As my fingers skated over Mom's note or the happy duckling's face on the front, I felt calm and safe. I started to use the card as a bookmark. As I read about Laura and her family, my "ma" smiled at me from between the pages.

I did not know then, as I read my *Little House* books on those homesick afternoons, that the *Little House* series was actually the product of a decade-long collaboration between mother and daughter, the finer points of which are still debated today. The books began with *Pioneer Girl*, an autobiographical manuscript that Wilder began writing in 1930. By that time, Wilder was already a known author; she had published a number of articles and columns about farming and housekeeping in Midwestern newspapers as well as a collection of children's poetry. Pamela Smith Hill suggests that personal tragedy—the deaths of Wilder's father, mother, and older sister in 1902, 1924, and 1928, respectively—may have prompted sixty-three-year-old Wilder to finally start writing down the story of her early years (130). After Wilder finished *Pioneer Girl*, Wilder's daughter, Rose Wilder Lane, also a well-known journalist, shopped the manuscript around to friends in the publishing industry. Lane had difficulty selling *Pioneer Girl*, so she tried creating a new story from her mother's autobiography.

Lane's new project was a collection of Charles Ingalls's stories that Wilder had shared in *Pioneer Girl*. Lane and Wilder gave this new children's book manuscript the nostalgic title *When Grandma Was a Little Girl* (Hill 134). The *Grandma* manuscript was accepted by a publisher with the caveat that Wilder and Lane would add more details about everyday pioneer life to flesh out a fuller fictional narrative. In 1932, *Little House in the Big Woods* was published, and Wilder began work on *Farmer Boy* shortly thereafter. *Little House in the Big Woods* was a book that seemed tailor-made for Depression-era America, and it was received with many positive reviews. The novel's themes of self-sufficiency and family values seemed to reflect the attitudes and struggles

of its readers and their own families, and, just Alcott's *Little Women* had recalled a more peaceful time, Ingalls and Lane's *Little House*-s remembered a more hopeful one that offered more opportunities for prosperity. For the next ten years, Wilder and Lane would publish a book almost every two years, choosing to end the series with *These Happy Golden Years* in 1943.

While both Lane and Wilder claimed throughout their lives that Wilder was the sole author of the *Little House* books, scholars like Ann Romines, who have examined the correspondence between mother and daughter during the years of the series' composition and publication, now suggest that perhaps the books were created by a "composite author, with strengths and qualities that do not exactly match the independently produced publications of either collaborator" (Romines 47). It appears that while Wilder provided much of the detail and voice of the novels, Lane often served as manuscript typist and editor as well as a valuable advisor in the trends and techniques of the fiction market of the period (Fellman 44).

Wilder and Lane's collaborative process was not without tension. Mother and daughter seemed cut from vastly different cloth. Wilder was content with rural simplicity, but Lane longed to live in the city. Even after Lane found homes in San Francisco, Europe's capital cities, Baghdad, and Azerbaijan, a trip back to the Ozarks to stay with her parents would lead her to scrawl: "'*I want to get away from here!'*" (Hill 92). Wilder made the pioneer spirit her guiding philosophy, but Lane confessed that "'I was brought up on pioneer stories, and never a spark from me'" (Hill 91), an ironic comment, Hill

notes, given the integral role she played in creating the *Little House* books as well as the fact that her strongest independent fiction was also based on her family's pioneer stories.

Through letters, Lane and Wilder argued about the placement of houses and natural landmarks in various towns or the things Ma and Pa would or would not have said (Hill 167, 169). Perhaps their most frustrating—and important—conflict was instigated by the manuscript of *By the Shores of Silver Lake*. Lane, who always had an eye on the publishing market, was concerned that the quickly aging Laura character would outgrow readers and should be replaced by her younger sister Carrie as the series' central character. She was also concerned by her mother's decision to include Mary's blindness and the death of Jack, the family's beloved brindle bulldog, in the book. Though Wilder admitted that revisiting these difficult times as she wrote was insomnia-inducing hell for her (Romines 143), she dismissed Lane's suggestions, saying: "'You fear [*Silver Lake]* is to [sic] adult. But adult stuff must begin to be mixed in, for Laura was growing up… I believe children who have read the other books will demand this one. That they will understand and love it…'" (Romines 140) Wilder won the argument, and Laura remained the protagonist in the *Little House*, a little girl who would grow up quickly in the final four books of the series.

Growing up myself, I watched a lot of friends argue with their mothers the way Wilder and Lane must have. Death intervened before my mom and I could experience such conflict. When I was in fourth grade, about a year after I had finished reading the *Little House* books, my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. I do not remember

experiencing any sort of profound shift in the daily life of my family at the time; perhaps my youth protected me from it. There were afternoons when Mom was sick and would spend the day in her bedroom or taking hot baths to ward off migraines. Her dark, curly hair thinned, but she could still pull it back in an elastic or a barrette. By the time I was in middle school, however, chemotherapy had taken its toll on my mom. Some treatments would work, but some treatments would send her to the hospital with dangerously low white blood cell counts. She wore a wig. Soon, Mom started to teach my brothers and me how to do the things she normally did around the house. Each of us learned how to do our own laundry, and on evenings or weekends, Mom would pull Kristopher and me into the kitchen to show us how to use the stove and the oven. We learned how to brown meat for tacos and boil spaghetti, how to set the right temperature on a convection oven and use the electric griddle for pancakes. After years of just enjoying the treat of "licking the spoon" when Mom made chocolate chip cookies, we baked them with her, creaming the sugar, butter, and eggs first, and then adding the flour, bit by bit.

Going shopping with my mom had long been one of our rituals, and on one particular trip during the spring of seventh grade, she turned to me in the Wal-Mart parking lot and asked, "What do you know about the Easter Bunny?"

I had not suspected this for long—my parents were *very* good at making Christmas and Easter magic—but I had to admit the truth. "He's not real?" I questioned, not really wanting to hear the answer.

"Thank God!" Mom bounced her hands on the steering wheel. "It's been exhausting taking twice the amount of shopping trips these last few years. I'd have to go

shopping once with you and then go back again to get the things for Santa and the Easter Bunny. And your father is *no* help when it comes to wrapping everything. Now, I have an elf!"

As sad as it was to admit that I knew about Santa, it felt exciting to be "in" on the secret with my Mom. For the next few Christmases, she and I sat up late into the night on Christmas Eve, wrapping the presents for the next morning. I even learned where she had been hiding the presents—in plain sight—in the far back corner of the basement. If any one of us kids had thought to peel back the bright orange Fleet Farm bags that were piled in the corner behind some old cabinets, Santa Clause would have stopped coming to town.

Christmas of 1999 was Mom's last. On July 30, 2000, I slept overnight at Amy's house. She and I, long past our days of playing dress-up and riding in a make-believe wagon train with our brothers, spent the night playing board games with her little sister and watching romantic comedies. At my house, Matt made a fort with my brothers in the basement while Ruthie sat with my dad in my parents' bedroom as Mom, delirious in the last throes of her life, angrily pushed off the covers that Ruthie continued to pull over her chilled body. Ruthie said it was like my mom thought the sheets and blankets were stopping her from going somewhere.

The next day, in the gray light of early morning, Ruthie gently shook me awake in my sleeping bag and told me I needed to come home. A light rain was falling outside as I crossed through the line of bushes between our yards like I had on so many summer afternoons. I needed to come home because Mom was gone.

At Mom's funeral service, around our neighborhood, at Mass, and at family gatherings, everyone told me that it was important for me not to "be the mom" and "stay a kid." But "being the mom" for the family was the only way I could think of coping. If I wore Mom's clothes and jewelry and cooked the meals she used to make in her kitchen, then she would not seem so far away. If I could do all the Christmas shopping and wrap the presents with our special stash of Santa paper, then Christmas could stay as magical for Erik and Jeremy, my two youngest brothers, as it had been when I was their age.

Thirteen years after Mom died, I re-read *By the Shores of Silver Lake* and had a moment of recognition at age twenty-eight that I could not have anticipated when I first read the book two decades before. In the chapter "Grown Up," thirteen-year-old Laura is asked to assist Ma on the Ingalls women's journey by train to meet Pa near De Smet. Jack, the family guard dog, has just died, and Pa has ridden away with Aunt Docia to go to the railway camp:

> Laura knew then that she was not a little girl any more. Now she was alone; she must take care of herself. When you must do that, then you do it and you are grown up. Laura was not very big, but she was almost thirteen years old, and no one was there to depend on. Pa and Jack had gone, and Ma needed help to take care of Mary and the little girls, and somehow to get them all safely to the west on a train. (14)

As I read, I realized that, at fifteen, I had felt exactly like Laura did. I needed to help "Ma" get the family "safely to the west." My family arrived, but somehow I had not.

During my senior year of high school, my dad remarried. My stepmother, a high school friend to both of my parents who had also been a Brownie Scout with my mom, moved into our house during my sophomore year of college, after my stepsister graduated from her high school. Nine years later, my dad and step-mom decided to move out of the house into a new place of their own, a decision that was not unexpected but nevertheless ill-timed; we kids had thought they would wait until everyone had graduated from college. The new house felt foreign and unfamiliar; Dad and Mary Jo made every effort to make the place feel like home, but I felt like a guest now, not a caretaker. Not long after the move, all three of my brothers proposed to their longtime girlfriends, all of whom I was thrilled to call sisters. Nevertheless, thirteen years after I had vowed to take care of the homestead and see my family "safely west," Dad had remarried and moved out of my childhood home, my three brothers were preparing to start families of their own, and I had no idea who I was supposed to be for my family anymore. I had stopped thinking of myself as just a sister and daughter so long ago that I had forgotten how to play the part. The only way I could make sense of this all this change was by traveling. Perhaps a pilgrimage to a little house could help me figure out where my home was supposed to be.

Fans of Laura Ingalls Wilder's books began traveling to her family's former homesteads as early as 1946, three years after *These Happy Golden Years* was published. Anita Clair Fellman reports in *Little House, Long Shadow*, her study on the impact of the *Little House* books on American culture, that a young reader named Margaret visited a

few *Little House* locations in 1946, and a brother and sister traveled to more destinations in 1948 (185). The largest Wilder museum, a complex surrounding the author's final home at Rocky Ridge near Mansfield, Missouri, was open to the public only three months after Wilder's death in 1957, thanks to the formation and efforts of the Laura Ingalls Wilder Home Association. Meanwhile, in De Smet, South Dakota, a similar organization was forming and making efforts to preserve its town's connections to the life of *Little House,* including the only two surviving homes in which Charles and Caroline Ingalls had lived (Fellman 205). Both Rocky Ridge and the De Smet houses were greeted by hundreds of visitors in their first days and thousands within their first seasons.

The Little House Wayside in Pepin began with the efforts of the local library. According to William Anderson, in 1961, a library committee located the spot of the Ingallses' farm and secured a historical marker for the cabin site. Though the house had been gone since the 1920s, the committee could still see some of the original foundation stones as well as the outline of the house on the ground. By 1974, a Laura Ingalls Wilder Memorial Society had been created to raise funds for a better cabin site (Anderson 12), and in 1979, six hundred people were present to watch the society dedicate the site (Fellman 205) with a memorial plaque and replica cabin made in the style of one that the Ingallses would have lived in.

Fellman explores the phenomena of *Little House* pilgrimage in a chapter of *Little House, Long Shadow* called "The Little House Readers at Home." She suggests that "hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of American readers do not regard these particular books in a casual way. They make a special place for them in their minds,

hearts, memories, and lives" (187). As proof of her claims, Fellman shares stories of children collecting pebbles, as Laura did, at Lake Pepin, wading in Plum Creek, and listening to the church bell that the Ingalls family raised funds for in Walnut Grove. In *The Wilder Life*, Wendy McClure writes about how important it was for her to pick up pebbles at Lake Pepin, since the incident in which Laura loses her pebbles was so evocative of the early pangs of childhood disappointment, and later in the memoir, a twisted haystick like those that helped the Ingallses survive the long winter becomes a sort of talisman for McClure, a symbol of endurance or prairie spirit that she cannot bring herself to throw away. Though it sits in a plastic bag at the back of her closet, this *Little House* "sacra" seems to provide McClure with a sense of stability and inspiration (320).

Guests' compulsion to pick up pebbles, wade in a creek, ride in a covered wagon, or even make a haystick fire starter are part of what sociologists specializing in tourism call "the performance turn" (Urry 190). In *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, tourism scholars John Urry and Jonas Larsen explain that "the performance turn highlights how tourists experience places in multi-sensuous ways that involve bodily sensations and affect" (190). Adventure tourism like horseback riding through the Grand Canyon or resort beaches with rigorous schedules of sand and sea activities cater to the performance turn. Such tourism theories are relatively new, but the performance turn has long been a part of tourism, particularly literary pilgrimage. For eighteenth and nineteenth century pilgrims, repeating the actions and activities of favorite characters in the places where those characters were said to have lived was a means of turning fiction into much-hoped-for reality (Watson 140). For the literary pilgrim, the "performance turn" takes on the aura of

ritual. As the pilgrims whose knees rubbed the hard stone steps of Canterbury Cathedral into soft waves, so our feet (and, in some cases, our replica covered wagons[14]) rub paths into the ground where there were once tall prairie grasses.

I imagined my drive to Pepin as the "performance turn" of my own *Little House* pilgrimage. Perhaps "performance turn" was just a grown-up name for playing make-believe the way I used to in my backyard. Having "watered the horses" and brushed the dust of the road from my faux-calico blouse at the Rock Creek gas station, I hopped back into the car and drove the rest of the way to Pepin and my first stop, the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum.

The museum made me nervous. It was a museum/gift store/visitor center hybrid, three or four rooms filled to near overflowing with antiques on display and faux-antiques for sale. Across from a glass department store case that held replica china shepherdesses and even a pig's bladder balloon[2], all labeled with handwritten index cards or cut-up strips of typewriter-inked paper, were stacks of hand-sewn bonnets and doll clothes made by local craftswomen, some of whom might have been running the cash register. A Civil War uniform was draped on a mannequin against the west wall; a replica doll house of one of the Little Houses stood on a rotating stand across from it. A variety of stuffed game stared from their perches in corners or their mounts on the walls.

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[2] In *The Little House in the Big Woods*, one of the joys of hog-butchering day is Laura and Mary's chance to play with a balloon that Pa makes by inflating the hog's bladder. Throughout the series, Laura admires Ma's delicate china shepherdess, a figurine that she displays in many of the Ingallses' homes.

I remembered now how Wendy McClure had described the Pepin museum as "one of the more eccentric homesite museums" (317) of *Little House* lore. I couldn't disagree. There was no organization here! And this wasn't really a "Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum"; none of the things in here belonged to her! I wanted to be a good guest and take my time oohing and aahhing over the collection that had been curated since the1970s, but nothing could hold my attention. I did not want to see objects that were "like" those Laura and her family would have used; I wanted to see actual objects that the family owned. I wanted to see the objects that the Ingalls family had taught me how to use!

In the introduction to her study of the *Little House* series, Ann Romines explains how the "things, the ordinary keepsakes and accoutrement of a hard-pressed household[…]reiterate the little house story […] The survival of such objects is doubly important because the dwellings Wilder wrote about did not survive" (4). From my research, I knew that most of the significant objects of Laura's life—her father's fiddle, her mother's china shepherdess, the lap desk she brought to Mansfield in which she had nearly lost a $100 bill—were either housed at Rocky Ridge or lost to time, but a part of me had still hoped to see some object that Wilder had touched and treasured.

In *The Wilder Life*, Wendy McClure had mentioned her own affection for the "things" of the little houses, an affinity she thought she could trace back to her interest in Richard Scarry's picture books when she was a child (4). As I prepared to interview McClure for my thesis just a few months before going to Pepin, I learned that she edited and ghostwrote Boxcar Children novels, another classic series that featured young

characters and their significant objects, like Benny Alden, the youngest Boxcar child, and his cracked pink cup. I knew I needed to ask her more about objects and why they matter in children's literature.

"Kids are encouraged to connect with objects like teddy bears; there's something that they *have* and carry to comfort themselves with, but at the same time, they don't have a lot of things of their own" McClure said. "As a kid, there's a sense of possession that's kind of a complicated thing when you're a child. There are things that you can't touch, and there are things that are supposedly yours but you can't get them dirty or go around breaking them. And also I think, you know, maybe […] seeing, inquiring, and having possessions [is] something [that represents] not necessarily the adult world, but the 'people world.' When you have things of your own that are just your size, that are part of your own little domain, it's a powerful thing."

I passed by a stack of rag dolls being sold in the gift shop and thought about what Wendy McClure had said a few months earlier, and then I thought about *Little House in the Big Woods* and the colorful Garth Williams illustration on the front cover. In the picture, Laura, her brown hair ragged from sleep, stands in a red nightgown while she cuddles her new cloth Christmas doll, Charlotte. The way Laura looked at Charlotte was the way I had looked at Baby Kate, a Cabbage Patch doll I had received when I was two years old. Somewhere, there was a photograph of little me in a red bathrobe and haircut very similar to Laura's from the cover of *Big Woods*, clutching my new doll to my chest.

I had clung to Baby Kate the way Laura held onto Charlotte. After my mom died, however, my attachment to things grew beyond the realm of childhood comforts. All the

tools Mom had used in the kitchen or even the items from her past that she'd packed away long before her death seemed to take on the significance of relics. It seemed wrong to give her possessions away and blasphemous to move them. Perhaps the *Little House* books had made more of an impact on me than I realized. As Ann Romines argues:

> "These transient shelters [of the little houses] derive enduring meaning from the repeated rituals of furnishing, maintenance, and housekeeping that are supervised by Laura's fictional mother and crowned with her signifier of domestic approval, a fragile, cherished china shepherdess that only Ma can touch and that she withholds from any dwelling that is below her standard. […] For me and many of my fellow readers, finding these very things physically present in the Mansfield museum seems to confirm the triumphant durability of the Little House myth. The serial house, the unchanging family, the undying things—all are preserved by women who, however transient their emigrant lives may have been, understood the powers of housekeeping. And the powers of writing. (4)

Romines and fellow readers' reliance on Wilder's nostalgic fiction for a personal sense of security and reassurance support Roberta Rubenstein's theories about the soothing powers of nostalgia. The presence of objects from Laura Ingalls Wilder's life in museums confirms the "durability of the Little House myth" for readers and tourists like Ann Romines, assuring them that they still have the "little house" to come home to. Similarly, the consistent placement of Mom's objects and repetition of her rituals let me perpetuate the myth that she was still alive.

Not long after I arrived at the museum, I was ready to leave again. I bought a copy of William Anderson's *The Little House Guidebook*, a book about all of the *Little House* sites, and then I asked for directions to the Little House Wayside, the site of Laura's birthplace, from one of the elderly women at the cash register. Soon, I was traveling along County Road CC, a quiet drive of rolling hills that, according to Anderson's guidebook, "approximates Pa's trail into town" (13). Now, as the saying goes, I was getting somewhere. The June day had been overcast; I silently prayed that I would make it to the Little House Wayside before any storms hit. However, the threat of the storm made my trip somehow more "Ingalls-ian." Laura and her family had faced blizzards and hailstorms and swarms of grasshoppers; surely I could endure some rain.

As my car dipped and crested along the waves of the road, I could see acres of green forest and farmland on my side of the car. The thick clouds opened in small cracks across the sky so that bright shafts of white sunlight marked exact points on the horizon. Whenever I read the *Little House* books, I always got mad at Pa Ingalls for his attacks of wanderlust and his eagerness to move the family farther and farther West, but if the vistas were like this every time he traveled, how could I blame him? As I drove, the sunlight pointed to the land like God in a Charlton Heston movie; it was a big, grand gesture of nature that said, "THIS is where you must go! Drive on! Lead my people!"

The Little House Wayside was at the top of one of the rolling hills on County Road CC. When I stepped out of my car, I took out my camera to capture a panoramic photo of my surroundings. A few creaking barns and farmhouses stood across from the wayside parking lot, but the rest of the scene was filled with farm fields and trees and

gathering storm clouds. *"As far as a man could see to the north in a day or a week, or a whole month, there was nothing but woods,"* I heard a little girl say in my head. I wanted her to whisper rather than speak aloud for fear of breaking the eerie quiet. Pre-storm winds were rustling the leaves on the big trees that surrounded the wayside.

Then, I turned around, and in front of me was the birthplace of Laura Ingalls Wilder. It wasn't the house she had lived in, but it was a cabin that tried its best to replicate the place where the Ingallses would have lived. I was struck by how simple it was. Most of the house museums I toured were newer houses or homes of families who were much wealthier than the Ingallses ever were. This log cabin was only a bit bigger than my one-car garage. Surely my apartment was double its size. But just like Laura said in the books, this "little gray house made of logs" (*Big Woods* 1) could somehow hold a family of five.

When I was younger, I had imagined that one day I would visit the little houses with Amy, but on the day of my trip to Pepin, she and her husband were busy caring for their new baby, her parents' sixth grandchild. She was not just playing "Ma"; she was one. When I looked at Amy's extended family's Christmas card photo each year, I thought about how comfortable they all seemed with each other and felt both glad and envious. I wanted Amy to have that kind of family, but I also wanted that family for myself. Since my dad had remarried, holidays left me feeling a little bit lost. I did not want to foist my family's traditions on my stepmom or stepsiblings, so trying to maintain those traditions without everyone joining in was awkward, but I did not want to abandon those traditions, either. I was also reluctant to start anything new, to embrace some ritual

that would never include my mom. I knew I could have happy Christmases again with a family of my own, but I saw no husband or children on my near horizon.

Wendy McClure surprised herself when she realized her trips around the country to all of Laura's little houses had something to do with coping with her mother's death. When I finished reading *The Wilder Life,* I felt in some sense that she and I had lived the same life. I did not started seeing a grief counselor until after I graduated from college, almost ten years after my mother's death and just a few years before I visited Pepin. Like McClure, who nods tearfully when her friend Kara asks, "'Do you think that there's something you're trying to figure out with all this?'" (320). I was beginning to realize that my travels to literary destinations were motivated by more than mere curiosity.

The first chapter of *Little House in the Big Woods,* appropriately called "Little House" is a small window into what will become the world of the rest of the series: Pa brings home a deer and builds his own smokehouse, Ma turns one hog into a bounty of provisions to be stored for the winter, Mary and Laura can hear wolves outside their window but feel safe as they watch their capable parents perform their self-sustaining, home-making tasks, and the day ends with Pa taking out his fiddle to play by the light of the fire. "That was the best time of all" (23), the narrator says, implying that Pa's fiddle serenade was the happiest part of Laura's day. But I wonder if the whole chapter, that collection of everyday moments in the small world of a loving, nuclear family protected by gumption and optimism, is really "The Best Time of All." Fellman suggests that writing the *Little House* books gave Wilder a chance to "recast her past"; she could revise

her father's economic failures and frame her family as a model for generations past and present (Fellman 43). By engaging nostalgia to write her *Little House* books Wilder could, as Rubenstein describes it, *secure* the past she was afraid to lose and *correct* its most painful flaws (6). That first chapter captures the uninhibited and innocent joy of early childhood, the kind of joy I remembered feeling on those December evenings around the kitchen table making Christmas cookies. For thirteen years, I had tried so hard to take my mother's place and recapture that "best time of all." Now that my dad had moved out of the house I grew up in, even the location of that "best time" was gone. Could I ever bring it back?

I stared at the gravel in the hearth of the empty log house and tried to imagine a fire burning and the smells of Ma's cooking filling the room. The sunny color of the wood brought a homey warmth to the empty interior. If I closed my eyes, I could see a cook stove in the corner and straw-tick mattresses covered by patchwork quilts in the lofted room above. I imagined curtains made from scrap fabric on the windows and Ma's china shepherdess on its special bracket on the wall. My memory of *Little House in the Big Woods* made it all palpable. There was a home here once, a place where a little girl had felt safe enough to dream big.

I stepped back into my car just as the rain started to fall. It was gentle and quiet, and the hypnotic *swish* of my windshield wipers led me to start thinking of what I had learned on my journey. I began my study of the *Little House* series feeling certain that Little House pilgrimages were inspired by the many scenes of travel in the books. After all, the series is about a family that is constantly on the move led by a father with

wanderlust and a protagonist who yearns to live like a bird or a wild pony. Every detail of pioneer life is described for the reader so that she can understand it and perhaps even perform it. I thought pilgrims were inclined to make the journey to the Little Houses because the books made them want to travel, but re-reading the books and visiting The Little House in the Big Woods has reminded me how important it is to have a safe place to explore from. The real and fictional Laura Ingalls Wilder faced many hardships with her family, but all of them prepared her for the challenges and triumphs of her personal and professional life. The ingenuity the Ingallses employed after the devastation of Pa's wheat crop or during the blizzards of the long winter made Laura strong enough to face the fire that engulfed her and her husband's first home. In *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, Laura expresses resentment over having to pursue teaching or perform domestic duties like her mother, but studying for her teaching certificate surely helped the real Laura Ingalls Wilder develop her writing voice, and the housekeeping tips Laura learned from Caroline influenced her first forays into professional writing, the newspaper columns about life as a farmer's wife for *The Missouri Ruralist*. In her journals, Rose Wilder Lane complained about having grown up in a backwater town with a mother who was rooted in traditions that seemed generations old, but Lane's discomfort motivated her own travels. Lane's parents crossed the United States before settling in Missouri; Rose sailed all over the world knowing she could always come back home to Rocky Ridge.

My mother died when I was fifteen, and losing her was awful, but before she died, she gave me a safe place from which to start. She gave me enough love and encouragement to feel confident in my talents, practical skills that would help me survive

without her, and memories that made me believe that the world could be as magical as my books made it seem. "It is a beautiful world," Laura tells her husband as they sit on their porch at the end of *These Happy Golden Years*. I might always be homesick for "the best time of all," but I realize now that those years prepared me to find wonder in the world and look for beauty in whatever I could see from my doorstep. Maybe that is what "the best time of all" is really all about.

Long ago, I pretended to travel west in a covered wagon and build a log house on the prairie. I felt safe from the wolves and the bears and the storms because I was in my own backyard. As I pulled away from the Little House Wayside, a grown-up's make-believe Little House in the Big Woods, I started to think it was time to "go west." Maybe I couldn't go back to "the best time of all" by standing still. Maybe it was time to explore.

CHAPTER II

HILL TOP FARM: "Under the Garden Gate"

I spent my childhood summers hiding from the wolves and bears of Laura Ingalls Wilder's Big Woods, but in the spring of 2006, seven years before I visited Pepin, I was about to visit a mecca for literary pilgrimage, England, while on the trail of a 100-year-old rabbit.

"How about Beatrix Potter?" my advisor, John Pennington asked. He peered over the flat rims of his reading glasses, eyebrows raised, as I contemplated his suggestion. I looked around, appreciating Dr. Pennington's whimsical approach to interior decorating and literary scholarship. On the bookshelves behind him, heady tomes on nineteenth-century British literature were bookended by action figures of Freud and Shakespeare. A big sock monkey stared at me from atop a filing cabinet across from my chair.

The author's name slowly emerged from the foggy forest of my memory. It was my junior year of college, and I had not heard it in so long that it took me a moment to realize who she was.

"Beatrix Potter. The author of *Peter Rabbit*?" I tried to clarify.

"Yes, she spent a lot of time in the Lake District or lived there, if I remember correctly. She even wrote a scientific study about some of the wildlife there."

I had stopped in Dr. Pennington's office to ask him some questions about my upcoming semester abroad. I had decided to attend a program at Lancaster University in

northern England, and now I had to plan a Foreign Study Project to maintain my enrollment in my college's honors program. I wanted to study an author native to northern England since I would be spending most of my time there.

I knew the Lake District had been home to many romantic poets, and I had studied *Jane Eyre* with Dr. Pennington, so I thought he would recommend Wordsworth or Bronte, but he was suggesting that I could write about the woman whose rabbit ran around my miniature tea set.

In the warm light of Dr. Pennington's office lamp, I could picture my bedroom and the small shelf of special treasures that hung on my rose-colored wall. I saw the tiny white tea set my godmother had brought back for me from London when I was very young. A little brown rabbit in a light blue coat raced hurriedly around each cup. A farmer with a funny hat and beady black eyes shook his rake as he ran across the bowl of a pitcher for cream. The ears of the brown rabbit peeked out from a watering can on the sugar bowl, and on the tops of the plates and the belly of the happy, round teapot, a mother rabbit in a wide, white apron tucked her bunnies into brightly colored jackets. I remembered how much I had liked the poppy red hue of the girl bunnies' cloaks.

Had my love affair with England started then? With those bunnies on the tea set and my godmother's postcard, a photo of Princess Diana with her sparkling eyes? Perhaps my independent study should go back to the beginning, I thought. Studying Potter meant going back to before I read Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte, before I watched *Masterpiece Theatre* while I finished the cross-stitch patterns my mom had left behind, pretending I lived in "the Victorian Era," or before I made a tradition out of

watching *Bridget Jones's Diary* and some Merchant-Ivory film in the basement every New Year's Eve, trying to stave off the melancholy that the new year always brought.

In the few years before my mom's death, we had started a family tradition of New Year's Eve movie marathons, and though she was not around to celebrate the first years of the new millennium, it seemed wrong to celebrate them any differently. The English accent requirement for the movies was my own invention; everyone in those movies just sounded so sophisticated and wise, the plots were always romantic, and characters were very good at ignoring their own deep, emotional problems. When New Year's Eves rolled around, I would beg off plans with friends or family, sneak a small Tupperware cupful of Bailey's Irish Cream from the downstairs fridge, plant myself on the sagging couch in the basement, and try to be English, "tut-tutting" at characters as they made decisions that were sure to hurt them in the end.

Beatrix Potter had introduced me to England, but the more I thought about her, the more I grew skeptical of whether or not I could write a paper celebrating Peter Rabbit. Potter's little rabbit had enchanted me when I couldn't read, but once I grew old enough to understand Potter's books on my own, I realized that Peter was a bad little bunny. I was a good little girl (albeit one who secretly drained her family's stash of Bailey's), so it was hard for me to empathize with a creature who risked being baked into a pie when he disobeyed his mother.

I didn't like breaking rules. As the big sister to three brothers, I understood that it was my job to set the example, and the times when I failed to set a good example left me feeling so ashamed and disappointed in myself that I feared moments when I might fail

again. I made safe choices and assumed I was all the happier and better for having done so. I appreciated my place in the family just as I appreciated the leadership positions I held in high school and college; all of these opportunities offered obvious excuses not to break any rules or be tempted to break them. When my friends and I went out, I was the one who "shushed" us in the movie theater or yanked a friend around a corner if she started to say something embarrassing in public. I loved the idea of writing about an author who had been special to my childhood, but what more could be said about a bad little bunny? I boarded the plane to Manchester Airport still worried about what might become of my project. In the next six months, as I toured England, read biographies of Potter, and visited her Lake District home, I would learn just how much I had underestimated Beatrix Potter. I would also find that perhaps I had underestimated myself.

Helen Beatrix Potter was born on July 28, 1866, the first child and only daughter of Rupert and Helen Potter of 2 Bolton Gardens in the fashionable neighborhood of South Kensington, London. Though their families had made their fortunes in the vibrant textile industries of northern England, Helen and Rupert Potter aspired to lives of leisure in London society. Rupert Potter had a law practice, but well-invested inherited wealth made it such that he never had to argue a case (Lear 19). The Potters' position in London society afforded a number of valuable opportunities for travel and independent study for young Beatrix, but the confining rules and expectations that accompanied such a life would later cause some of Potter's most frustrating personal trials. Like the natural world

she so brilliantly captured in the watercolor illustrations of her children's books, Beatrix Potter was constantly evolving, even while the events and circumstances of her life seemed static and dull. A natural seeker, Potter's dogged pursuit of her own curiosity—in science, in business, in life—birthed a revolutionary scientific theory, an iconic rabbit, and a sprawling national park.

Growing up, Beatrix and her younger brother Bertram had few playmates their own age. Instead, the children became amateur zoologists, running around their London yard and holiday houses, taking in a menagerie of animals as pets, and even performing numerous dissections on dead animals they encountered. As Margaret Lane writes in her biography, *The Tale of Beatrix Potter*, "like most healthy children [Beatrix] and her brother were not squeamish […] if the dead specimen were not past skinning, they skinned it; if it were, they busily boiled it and kept the bones" (33). Along with studying wildlife, Beatrix Potter and her brother also painted it. Their interest in science was encouraged by their parents and embraced by their society. The rise of natural history museums had made Victorians mad for science, and microscopes became hubs of acceptable family activity for London's upper class (Lear 76).

Though she never attended formal schooling (a fact she later embraced, saying "'it would have rubbed off some of the originality'" (Lane 30)), Potter's outdoor experiments, access to scientific texts and museums, and the influence of family friends helped her to develop skills as a researcher and theorist. Today, Potter is most associated with her anthropomorphized bunnies, squirrels, hedgehogs, and ducks, but the subject that captured the attention of her pencils and paintbrushes in her early twenties was fungi.

As Linda Lear explains in *Beatrix Potter: A Life in Nature*, "[Potter] was drawn to fungi first by their ephemeral fairy qualities and then by the variety of their shape and colour and the challenge they posed to watercolour techniques" (78). Potter would take advantage of her family's holidays around Scotland and the Lake District, a pastoral lake country north of Lancaster, by searching for fungi to paint and study underneath her microscope.

While summering on Esthwaite Water in the Lake District in 1896, Potter began gathering specimens of *peziza* mushrooms to study their germination. Her observations of other fungi, molds, and lichens had led her to hypothesize that fungi which germinated through spores in their cups or fruit in the summertime must reproduce through a mold in the winter (Lear 112). She pursued her study of lichen, an organism dismissed by most scientists of the day as a "lower plant" (116), and concluded that some molds "produced a lichen which she believed was a hybrid: a dual organism composed of a fungus and an alga" (116). Potter also hypothesized, rather controversially, that the fungus and alga existed in a symbiotic relationship rather than a parasitic one (116). Potter was young and not a member of any elite scientific circle, but she was very knowledgeable of current botanical and biological theories thanks to her father's generous purchases of scientific studies like Oskar Brefeld's *Botanische Untersuchungen uber Schimmelpilze*, a seminal twelve-volume work on fungi that Beatrix read in its original German. Also, with the help of family and some of her father's contacts, she earned a student research ticket for London's Kew Gardens and frequently explored the collections of the Natural History Museum.

In 1897, with the help of her uncle Harry Roscoe and some hard-earned contacts at Kew Gardens, Potter was able to have her fungi study, "The Germination of the Spores of the Agaricinae," read by the Linnaean Society, the same group of scientists that had been some of the first to hear about Charles Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection. Unfortunately, Potter's paper is recorded as having been "'laid on the table'" at the society meeting, code for being read but not taken too seriously (Lear 123). Though the Linnaean Society dismissed Potter's theories at the time, scientists nearly a century later were able to prove that Potter's hypothesis was accurate and forward-thinking (482).

To most scientists, the reception Potter received from the Linnaean Society would have been a disappointment, but Potter, Lear suggests, was satisfied in having had the opportunity to share her amateur findings with a professional community. "Beatrix had defined a goal for her life […] to find something useful to do with her talents and to gain a measure of economic and personal independence" (Lear 126-127). As it happens, the inceptions of Potter's fungi theories and the "something useful" that would ensure her financial independence, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit,* happened almost simultaneously, both as a result of travel.

Lear explains that on a holiday in Scotland in 1893, before she started collecting the *peziza* specimens, Potter painted pictures of *strobilomyces strobilaceus* or "old man of the woods," a rare fungus that lived on pine cones. She had located some affected cones on the grounds of her family's rented house, Eastwood. Her painting and her discovery are remarkable for the period; sightings of the fungus were so rare that the first

official record of its presence in the British Isles was not made until 1899 (Lear 85), six years after Potter had painted and correctly identified the specimen in Scotland.

Then, one month after she painted the *strobilomyces strobilaceus*, while on that same family holiday, Potter sat down to write a letter to her former governess Annie Carter's son, Noel Moore. The letters Potter wrote to Noel and his siblings were special; they were picture letters that told stories. The picture letter Potter wrote in September 1893 told the story of a little rabbit named Peter, after her own pet rabbit, and his visit to Mr. MacGregor's garden. In the story, curiosity leads him on a great (and risky) adventure, just as it had (and would) for his creator.

Curiosity is how I ended up boarding American Airlines Flight 54 to Manchester on January 6, 2006. My semester abroad was my chance to see and learn about more of the world. I counted the rows of the plane—23, 24, 25—as I huffed down the aisle with a heavy backpack, grateful when I finally reached row 26. My seatmate was waiting.

"I'm 26J," I told her.

The woman in 26I smiled. Her onion-paper thin skin wrinkled into tiny stars around her eyes. "Oh, lovely."

A member of the flight crew had brought the woman in 26I, Margaret, onto the plane in a wheelchair before most other passengers boarded. She was 70, and underneath her mauve chenille sweater, she seemed as fragile as a baby bird. I could see the thin bones of her fingers and wrists underneath her skin as she struggled to buckle her

seatbelt. Once we settled in for the flight, we began to make the usual small talk of travelers: where we'd been, why we were there, where we were going and why.

Margaret, I learned, had been raised on a "fahm" in Ireland. Though she had lived with her husband in Manchester, England, for many years, her voice still danced with an Irish lilt. We were flying together out of O'Hare Airport; Margaret had been visiting her son, Seamus, now a soccer coach in the US, and her grandson Solman—"Such a clever boy!" –for the holidays.

As the plane climbed into the night sky, Margaret told me about her dear late husband Johnnie and even her own parents' courtship, a saga that spanned continents and involved a chance meeting at a dance hall an ocean away from where they had first met.

Later, the subject turned to food. Margaret told me about "Pancake Day," the English equivalent of Fat Tuesday, and she instructed me to eat my pancakes with lemon juice and a little powdered sugar. I promised I would. When our meals came, I helped Margaret's arthritic hands open the airtight containers of salad dressing, butter, and silverware, and, once our breakfast had arrived near the end of the flight, she taught me how to order my tea. After all those years of staring at my Peter Rabbit tea set, I had never actually tried a proper tea. Now, thanks to Margaret, I had had my first taste.

Margaret and I talked about families and food, but at one point, we also talked about faith. Margaret was Catholic, and she was delighted to learn that I was, too. She credited faith, particularly her prayers to St. Peregrine, the patron saint of cancer patients, for her recovery from breast cancer, which she had contracted shortly after Johnnie's death. She had only recently gone into remission.

As Margaret told her story, I felt goose bumps rise on my arms, even in the stuffy warmth of the cabin. She and I were bound by a common destination, and now our lives were linked by an all-too-common disease.

"I'm so glad you're better," I said, touching her hand. "I lost my mom to breast cancer six years ago. I know it can be a tough battle to face."

"'Tis, 'tis." Margaret nodded. "Now whenever I go to the doctor's I keep a St. Peregrine medal in me bra in hopes of a good report."

We both laughed at the notion of Margaret's medal jingling about in her underwire. She told me a bit more about her treatment, and I told her about how, since my mother and grandmother had had breast cancer, I knew I needed to keep a close eye on my health. Margaret patted my hand.

Talking with Margaret about my mom and her battle with cancer should have saddened me and made me homesick, but somehow the conversation and the unfortunate new connection Margaret and I shared actually comforted me and made me feel stronger. Since my mom's death, worries about my medical future had weighed heavily on my mind, but here sitting next to me was a spunky 70-year-old who had survived breast cancer. Maybe she was the kind of woman my grandmother would have been. Maybe she was the kind of woman I could grow old to be.

We were waiting to deplane when I saw Margaret rummaging through her purse. She let out an "aha!" as her thin fingers pinched around something shiny. She held it out to me. "For you," she said. "For good health." She placed a St. Peregrine medal in my palm.

The weather when I arrived in Lancaster after that memorable flight with Margaret was typical for a January afternoon in northwest England. As I sat in a cab with five other American students, our warm breath turned the windows as gray and foggy as the sky outside. I could feel a chill creep up my back and settle in for the afternoon. Once on campus, I called home only to say I had arrived safely, just as our study abroad advisors had told us to do. A knot formed in my throat as I started to say goodbye, and I knew a minute more on the phone would have left me in tears.

Jet-lagged, I trudged up the stairs to my single room in Bowland Hall, C Floor. I stuffed my comforter into the duvet cover as the porter had instructed. Duvet, porter, queue, quid, Uni; the words sounded funny. To try to get my bearings, I started to stick the magazine clippings I'd brought from home—an ad for *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, a poster from the newest film of *Pride and Prejudice*, a black and white photograph of the young Beatles pulled from *Entertainment Weekly*, all pictures of the England of my imagination—when I heard a knock on the door. A stout girl with frizzy black hair looped into a scrunchie at the nape of her neck was standing on the other side.

"A bunch of us on the corridor are going to the Sugarhouse tonight. Would you like to come?" The Sugarhouse was the university club in town. A friend who had studied in Lancaster the year before had told me all about it. My flatmates had just returned from break, and they were going to the club already? I'd never been to a nightclub. I'd never been out with friends to a bar. I never went to parties as a college freshman, and I was a Resident Assistant every year after, so I never risked going to parties where others might

be drinking under age. But something about the girl at my door, Charissa, made me feel safe. She folded her fingers over the cuffs of her black zip-up hoodie and tugged a bit at the arms, pulling the shoulder seams down. I realized that she and most of my "flatmates" were all "freshers," first year students. How lame would I be if I couldn't handle going out with them? I felt ready for a little adventure.

Though Beatrix Potter had balked at the idea of having a new governess at age seventeen, she quickly realized that Annie Carter would bring more adventure than restriction into her life. "Miss Carter" lived independently, and she had traveled widely. Her German and Latin lessons fascinated Beatrix (Lear 55). After Miss Carter married when Beatrix was nineteen, she and Beatrix maintained a close friendship such that Annie Carter Moore's ever-growing family became Potter's adopted nieces and nephews, and they loved Potter's picture letters. In addition to her letters about Peter Rabbit and Jeremy Fisher, a dapper toad on a fishing adventure, Potter often wrote stories about the animals she encountered while traveling. When Beatrix was finally able to visit the Moore family in 1899, Annie suggested that Beatrix try to publish the letters as books (Lear 142).

Though publishers enjoyed the story, none were interested in Potter's plan to make the book small enough for tiny hands and tiny pocketbooks, so Potter decided to self-publish *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. Just as her self-published run was gaining notoriety with family and friends, Fredrick Warne and Company, realizing that Potter's "little book" concept would actually help them compete in a market steered by successful little

books like Helen Bannerman's *Little Black Sambo*(Lear 144), offered to publish the tale as long as Potter agreed to contribute a few more color illustrations.

The Tale of Peter Rabbit was published by Frederick Warne & Co. in October 1902, and within a year, over 56,000 copies were in print (Lear 152). It seemed the Moore children weren't the only ones delighted by Miss Potter's "bunny book."

In *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, young Peter decides to disobey his mother and visit Mr. MacGregor's garden, the site of an unfortunate accident that led to his father being baked into a pie. While his mother is out getting bread, Peter sneaks under the garden gate and feasts on lettuce, radishes, and French beans. Soon, an angry Mr. MacGregor spies Peter chewing up his garden, and Peter leads the farmer on a frenzied chase through the garden. While trying to run away from the farmer, Peter loses a shoe and must shed his blue coat with its new brass buttons in order to escape the snare of a gooseberry net. He manages to evade MacGregor but not before exhausting himself and crying out of fear when he feels trapped. When he finally arrives home, his mother scolds him for losing his clothes and puts him to bed with chamomile tea while his sisters enjoy blackberries and milk for supper.

Given the success of *Peter Rabbit*, Frederick Warne & Co. was eager to publish more of Potter's picture letters and new stories. *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin*, a tale in the manner of Rudyard Kipling's "Just So" stories that explains how silly Squirrel Nutkin annoys Old Brown, the owl guardian of an island with a nut tree, until Old Brown bites off part of Nutkin's tail, was published in 1903. *Nutkin* offered Potter the opportunity to share her skills as a precise and scientific illustrator. Old Brown's island was modeled

after another of Potter's favorite vacation spots, and some illustrations feature the fungi and flora she had painted with such detail in her twenties (Lear161). More tales—about mice who take a holiday in a dollhouse (*The Tale of Two Bad Mice*), Peter Rabbit's misadventures with his mischievous cousin (*The Tale of Benjamin Bunny*), a little girl who goes chasing after a missing handkerchief and stumbles into the den of hedgehog washerwoman (*The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle*), and a disastrous tea between a cat and a dog (*The Tale of the Pie and the Patty-Pan*)—followed in 1904 and 1905.

The *Tale of Peter Rabbit* and Potter's subsequent tales seemed to presage the attempts at independence that their royalties and popularity enabled Potter to make. Potter's books featured the landscapes she loved captured with the keen scientific eye she had been honing for decades. In returning to the places and practices where she felt most free as a child, Potter gathered the courage and the funds she needed to finally live as an independent adult, away from the confines of her parents' ridiculously restrictive home. Though Beatrix and her brother were afforded freedom in the rural holiday houses the family visited every summer, their lives in town were far more regimented. Beatrix, as a single woman who had passed the conventional marriageable age (in part because her parents' clannishness kept her from socializing with many outside the family circle), was, until her writing gave her independent means, at the mercy of her parents' pocketbooks. Furthermore, Potter's chronic childhood illnesses seem to have made her parents overprotective of her, even in the third decade of her life.

The increasingly independent and confident Potter developed a friendship and eventually a romantic relationship with her publisher, Norman Warne. When Warne

proposed in summer 1905, 39-year-old Potter's parents were shocked by the prospect of their daughter marrying a man whose family was in trade[3]. When Warne died later that summer after suffering from a rapidly progressive form of leukemia, Potter was devastated and perhaps even more motivated to break away from her parents' stronghold. By late 1905, she had purchased Hill Top Farm, a property far away from urban London in her favorite retreat, the Lake District, with the proceeds from her animal tales. Hill Top would serve as Potter's studio, source of inspiration, and memorial to her legacy.

Many years later, the site of my own grasp for independence—from my routine and reputation rather than some oppressive household—was a dark club full of students, smoke, and sweat, a place that would never have fit in the confines of my normal life. Club beats and radio hits pulsed from the Sugarhouse DJ's towering speakers. I sat with Charissa and other students I recognized from the corridor and sipped a Malibu and Coke. It tasted sweet and a little sinful. I was wearing my darkest wash jeans and my longest, dangly earrings. As I had strung them through my earlobes, I remembered how I hadn't been allowed to wear long earrings until high school because my mom said they looked "trashy." Now, with my hair in an almost-perfect ponytail and my eyes lined in black, I still startled myself with how grown up I looked in the mirror.

"Come, Mister DJ song 'pon de replay/ Come, Mister DJ won't you turn the music up?" Rihanna sang as the song's infectious rhythm, a twist on a childhood clapping game, pounded through the speakers and into my heart. I danced in a circle of my

[3] Potter's second fiancé, the lawyer William Heelis, was not allowed in the Potters' house until almost six years after he began courting Beatrix (Lear 259).

Bowland neighbors, and when the song hit the bridge, I turned and smiled at another American student I'd seen during orientation. He stepped toward me, and I moved closer. I swiveled my hips in time with the music, angling closer with each beat, and soon, we were moving together in our own rhythm, this near stranger and I, until I felt as though I'd stepped outside my body. Who was this girl dancing with a boy she barely knew? The song ended, the American student walked toward the neon lights of the bar, and I looked back at the table from the corridor, expecting stern stares of disapproval or teasing comments about how the "good girl" had suddenly gone bad, the "prude" had turned raunchy. My friends back home would have teased me mercilessly, and I would have shied away from trying it again.

But no one said anything. To my flatmates, I was still the new American on the corridor, and I could be whoever I wanted to be without the strings or constraints of anyone's expectations or my own self-imposed rules. I could work hard for good grades because I wanted them, not because that's what was expected. I could laugh at my flatmates' antics and not worry about having to report any rule-breaking to a hall director. I could skip class on a Friday to take a trip to London because I might never get the chance to do it again. The normal rules and restrictions did not apply. Years later, I would learn a name for what I was experiencing—liminality—but at the time, I just called it wonderful.

In the weeks and months that followed, I wasn't reckless, but I did step much further out of my comfort zone than I had before. I celebrated my twenty-first birthday in Lancaster's clubs and pubs. I walked tipsily down the cobblestone streets and giggled

with my new friends as we flirted with Duncan, a bartender who poured us tall glasses of Sex on the Beach. I climbed the thin, slick paths of a craggy hill in Edinburgh in the rain and didn't bother about how soggy I looked when I was done. I slept above a flatulent Frenchman in a London hostel and was amused rather than appalled when I learned he slept nude. I relaxed on a beach in Barcelona and was so impressed by the nonchalance of the topless sunbathers I nearly tried it myself. I drank cider and sang at the top of my lungs in a Galway pub on St. Patrick's Day, I leaned in, unabashedly, to kiss the bust of Mr. Darcy on special display in the statuary of Chatsworth House, and I even, at the peak of my spontaneity, agreed to go out with my friend Danielle and two Italian boys in Sorrento who had spotted us from their vespas during our Easter *passegiata*.

As "freshers," my flatmates did not have to worry about their marks counting toward their GPAs, so every night on the corridor was a party. I would throw aside *Lord Jim* and *To the Lighthouse* to join my new friends in one of the communal kitchens where we would sit around the linoleum table, still piled high with someone's dirty dishes, and drink wine out of whichever glasses were clean. Sometimes, the porter had to stop up to tell us to quiet down. After two years of enforcing quiet hours when I patrolled the halls as a resident assistant, it felt good to be the one making the noise!

And sometimes we weren't noisy. On the first warm day of the spring, the corridor sprawled out on the lawn in the Bowland quad, revising for exams, reading novels, and sipping cold, fizzy Fanta. We quietly soaked up the sunshine as it made its welcome return. Back home, I never could have spent an afternoon so languidly; work or classes or a club meeting would have forced me to break up the revelry. But at Lancaster,

I had lived under the radar of campus life, and I marveled at why I hadn't left myself open to more spontaneity in the years before.

The time flew by, and before I knew it, I had only a month left of my semester abroad in which to complete my Beatrix Potter research. I booked a room at the Ambleside Youth Hostel in Lake Windermere and invited Caitlyn, a new friend from Canada, to join me for the trip. Caitlyn had been the Benjamin Bunny to my Peter Rabbit; just as Peter's Scottish cousin challenges the skittish rabbit to go back to MacGregor's garden to retrieve his missing coat in *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny*, Caitlyn challenged me to take risks while also honoring or even quietly appreciating my reserve. She had sprinted up that hill in Edinburgh, grabbing roots and jumping over gaps, while the rest of us huffed and puffed behind her, always taking careful steps. Unconvinced that I'd been "properly" drunk during the semester, she persuaded me to imbibe two shots of "Liquid Cocaine"—Goldschlager and Jagermeister—on her last night out. She made the rest of the girls on the floor jealous because she hung out with all the boys, but her heart had always belonged to Owen, her boyfriend back in Toronto. She was so cool and confident, and I felt lucky that she let me hang around. If I was being honest with myself, I knew I would not have been friends with her back home; I would have been too scared of the trouble she could get me into. Now, I wondered what I would do without her. Our trip to the Lake District would be our last "holiday" in England; Caitlyn was bound for Toronto only a few days after we returned to Lancaster, and I was only weeks away from going home, too.

As Susan Denyer explains in *Beatrix Potter: At Home in the Lake District*, Potter's responsibilities to her publisher and to her aging parents made it such that she could only stay at Hill Top for limited periods of time, but, as Denyer theorizes, "perhaps because she was an intermittent visitor […] she was able to arrange and compose each room as a picture, her possessions positioned for dramatic effect" (29), one that would benefit her readers. Potter made the most of her visits to Hill Top; she oversaw a number of renovations to the farmhouse and began filling it with locally-built oak furniture and other items that captured the growing Arts and Crafts movement of the period (38). Soon, Potter's favorite furniture pieces and even the sources of some construction frustration appeared in her new books, tales she drafted and illustrated at Hill Top. When she discovered that the property had a serious rat infestation, Potter hired local workers to repair the walls and then wrote *The Tale of Samuel Whiskers* (originally called *The Roly-Poly Pudding*), a story about a couple of rats who nearly get away with baking Tom Kitten into a pie (Lear 223). Visitors at Hill Top will notice the grandfather clock on the stairs (the placement of which was perhaps influenced by literature like Longfellow's poem "The Clock on the Stairs" (Denyer 39)) that stands behind Tabitha Twitchet, Tom Kitten's mother, in one illustration for *Samuel Whiskers*. In another illustration, Samuel's wife, Anna Maria, runs past an oak dresser, a precisely painted replica of the one in Hill Top's hall (54). Potter also took an active role in managing the livestock at Hill Top Farm. She began breeding Herdwick sheep around 1906 and in doing so was able to preserve and perpetuate an important native species.

With her growing royalties from her growing number of tales, Potter bought more land and farms in her area, always insisting that the land continue to be worked by local tenant farmers. As transportation improved and the middle class grew, more and more tourists were seeking respite in the Lake District, but the area's popularity threatened its natural resources. Potter was well aware of the importance of preserving natural landscapes, thanks to a long friendship with Hardwicke Rawnsley. Rawnsley, a pastor who was native to the Lake District, had hosted Potter's family at Wray Castle during their first visit to the Lake District in 1882. A year after the Potter's visit, Rawnsley formed the Lake District Defense Society, an organization that grew exponentially to become the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or National Beauty in 1895 (Lear 140). Today, the National Trust is the largest volunteer conservatory organization in Europe, and it boasts over 3.5 million members and 61,000 volunteers (National Trust).

With Rawnsley's society in mind, Potter bought more land and farms, usually with the help of solicitor William Heelis, a savvy country lawyer whom Potter married in 1913. "'I have a long way towards three thousand acres'" Potter wrote to a correspondent in the 1930s. "'It is an open secret it will go to the Trust eventually'" (Lear 430). Following Potter's death in 1943, the Heelis Bequest (Potter was quite content to be known as the farmer "Mrs. Heelis" rather than the writer "Miss Potter") "added over 4,300 acres to the National Trust's holdings in the Lake District" (Lear 444) along with a five-thousand pound monetary trust to be used for maintaining the land. The tales Potter wrote during her years at Hill Top and her married life at Castle Cottage came to be

known as the "Sawrey Tales," so named for the village and neighboring sites that frequently featured in Potter's illustrations. Potter even painted herself into a few of the pictures, an artistic choice that reflects how she wrote and painted herself into a new life. Potter's bequest to the National Trust would ensure that future students of science, art, nature, and life might have the opportunity to do something just as remarkable.

On our first full day in the Lake District, Caitlyn and I split up; I took a bus to Hawkshead, the closest village to Potter's Hill Top Farm, and Caitlyn made plans to hike some trails in the area. It was a beautiful day, so I decided to walk the few miles it would take to get to Hill Top, rather than wait for the visitors' bus. I was all alone on the one-lane road, and I wasn't afraid. All of the travel I had been doing in the last few months had made me feel confident and strong and much more capable of navigation than my standardized test scores in map skills suggested. Fields of tall grasses and the branches of knotty trees waved in the wind. I watched sheep grazing on hills and saw Esthwaite Water sparkle in its basin beneath the Langsdale Pikes, the mossy stone crags that towered in the distance.

"Goodbye, yellow brick roooooad," sang Elton John as I listened to a mix of my mother's favorite songs on my iPod. I walked toward Hill Top and thought of her as our upbeat favorites played one after the other, a reminder of the Friday afternoons when I would come home from school and the stereo was blasting as she cleaned. "I've finally decided my future lies…beyond the yellow brick road." The lyrics about a speaker who rejects high society in favor of "going back to the plough" made me think of Potter. I had

listened to the song a lot during my six months abroad; I wondered if it had something to do with me recognizing that this trip was a departure, a chance to see what might lie beyond the path I was planning to follow.

I was one of the first visitors to Hill Top that day, but ahead of me were a mother and daughter, holding hands as they walked toward the gray stone cottage. Its colorful garden was in bloom, full of flowers in my mother's favorite color, fuchsia. I entered the barn that served as the ticket counter and gift shop and watched as the little girl in front of me, her black pixie cut shining beneath a flowered headband, smiled at the ticket taker who proclaimed her a "very special guest." She toddled along next to her mother in white saddle shoes, a pink dress, and a white sweater that sparkled, as though covered in fairy dust, in the morning sunlight.

Hill Top was made for girls like the one in the sparkling sweater. The farmhouse was displayed in accordance with Potter's own strict instructions. The furniture and treasures of the house were positioned just as they are in the illustrations for *The Tale of Tom Kitten* or *The Tale of Samuel Whiskers*. As I walked from room to room, admiring the artwork that Potter, her father, and her brother had created, I wished I had come here as a little girl. All the guides bent down to the children's level to show them how the pictures in the child-sized books matched the features of a room.

One of my first questions for the guide came from the girl in me; I wondered whether the dollhouse on display was Lucinda and Jane's, the house that is ransacked by Hunca Munca and her husband Tom Thumb in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* (I'd recently read about how Norman Warne built the dollhouse for Potter and his niece). It wasn't the

same dollhouse, the guide explained, but its contents had been the model for Lucinda and Jane's feast. I could have written all about Potter's watercolor paintings or the kitchen cupboard with its china that featured so prominently in Potter's books, but instead I filled my journal with comments about the many "secretaries" that populated Hill Top; I loved the romance of the curio cabinet-cum-writing-desk, a place to tell tales that also hosted plenty of cubbies in which to hide them. When I was six, my maternal grandfather had sent a lot of his furniture up to our house before he went bankrupt. I dreamed of the day when I could put my grandmother's "secretary" in my own house and use it to write letters, instead of cramming it full of odds and ends from the living room the way we did now.

In *The Literary Tourist*, Nicola Watson categorizes Hill Top as one of a growing number of locations that cater to "tourism of the fantastic," attempted visits to "enchanted places and never lands" (201). Her trip to Hill Top led her to see it as a place that was "less a writer's house than enchanted place-text" where the author disappears (202). Guests, Watson argues, are "invited to engage in reading the house as a text rather than a writer's or illustrator's workshop" (203) as houses like the Brontes' Haworth, another literary home I had visited while in England, might be. As Watson suggested in my e-mail interview with her, this "vanishing author" style of presentation might have something to do with the author's genre. "[A]dult writer's houses (esp[ecially] those of poets) have a tendency to be premised on an ideology of genius – the idea that imaginative genius arose from this soil, the genius loci. Children's literature tourism is much more interested in the realisation of fictional place" (Personal Interview). Watson

concludes her study of Hill Top in *The Literary Tourist* by suggesting that the house "does not succeed in presenting itself as the origin of the books, or even as their meta-text, but rather, merely as one of a series of possible illustrations to them: not founding, but supplementary" (204).

Watson's theories could be supported by geographer Shelagh Squire's surveys of visitors to Hill Top. In her articles about Hill Top Farm's popularity, Squire concludes that, for many first-time visitors, Hill Top Farm's connections to Beatrix Potter are less important than the farm's ability to embody idealized "Englishness" and help visitors recover favorite childhood memories. Squire records testimonies from visitors, many of whom echo the sentiment of Louise, an American teacher, who says, "'I think Beatrix Potter represents what lots of adults would like to think England is like…the beautiful rural areas… This is the way we'd like it to be" ("Valuing Countryside" 7). The idealized Englishness of Hill Top then evokes visitors' idealized memories of their past. Squire suggests that Hill Top tourism is grounded in nostalgia when she questions whether the 76% of visitors who said they came to Hill Top because of interest in Potter were acting on interest generated by treasured childhood memories ("Gender and Tourist Experiences" 200). She cites evidence for her hypothesis in the form of numerous quotes from visitors who are eager to "'capture the spirit of childhood'" or hold on to their "child sel[ves]" (201). The results of Squire's focus groups about Hill Top demonstrate how, for adult visitors, "the books had become a way of defining and communicating family values and relationships" ("Gender and Tourist Experiences" 201), and thus visits to Hill Top Farm are attempts to reconnect with or establish those values within visitors'

own families. Squire suggests that, since many visitors recalled being read the Potter stories by their mothers, Hill Top visits are meant to "facilitate recovery of early childhood memories, usually associated with maternal closeness" (202), and since many of the visitors she interviews are women who are keen to pass the Potter stories on to children or grandchildren, she argues that Hill Top Farm evokes a particularly powerful nostalgia for female visitors.

I understood Watson's perspective, and I experienced the nostalgia Squire describes as I toured the farmhouse, but neither Watson's nor Squire's assessments of Hill Top properly reflected my overall experience of the place. Yes, I noticed how the property and its guides encouraged visitors to view the house from Peter Rabbit's or Tom Kitten's perspective. True, the house's presentation seemed to focus on making connections between objects in the house and Potter's illustrations, and, unlike other authors' houses I had visited, there was no shrine to the act of writing itself, no "desk where *Peter Rabbit* had been written" or "paintbrush that had brought Jemima Puddleduck to life." Nevertheless, all the research I had done about Potter before coming to the Lake District had made it impossible for Potter to disappear, and I had seen too much of England by this time to naively believe that Hill Top was the epitome of Englishness. Instead, I saw Hill Top and its surrounding lands, whose arrangement and display she had coordinated in her will, as evidence of Potter's triumph not only as a writer but as a businesswoman and a farmer. I toured a gallery of Potter's artwork and listened to parents read parts of her stories in sing-song voices, nonsense words like "Apply-Dapply" rolling off their tongues. I wrote in my journal at a café in Hawkshead

and watched a Mr. MacGregor lookalike hang his tweed hat on a post. I walked the sunny road to Wray Castle, Potter's first holiday home in the Lake District, and felt as though Potter was a part of the very landscape. Hill Top had not made her disappear. On the contrary, I think Potter's life and work in the Lake District made a woman who had once been reserved and obedient quite bold and omnipresent. I thought about Margaret, the spunky 70-year-old from my flight to Manchester. She and Beatrix were, as Linda Lear describes, "those rare individuals who [are] given a real third act" (Lear ix).

I met a tired Caitlyn at the hostel that evening; she had walked nearly 20 kilometers after accidentally combining two trails. There was a good chance Beatrix Potter had preserved some of the land along those trails, I told her. She was not amused. We dug into steaming plates of chicken and mushroom pie from the hostel kitchen and then told each other about the day's adventures over bites of warm black currant crumble. It was the first of June, so we took advantage of the late-evening sunset by bringing our journals out to the docks in front of the lobby after dinner. The hostel had once been a grand hotel, and it still boasted an incredible view of Lake Windermere. Caitlyn and I silently sat on a worn wooden bench and wrote in our journals as the sun slipped behind the peaks and the sky turned periwinkle.

I stopped writing and looked across the lake. The water lapped at the sides of sailboats as their rigging clanked lazily in the wind. Ducks quacked and flapped their wings as they landed and bathed in the lake. I put my chin on my knees and breathed in

the cool evening air. My chest ached as I realized how much my mom would have loved it here.

A few years after she had been diagnosed, Mom started fishing. She took trips to tiny lakes in northern Wisconsin and brought back coolers full of bluegills and crappies that she breaded and pan-fried herself. Sometimes I would go with her and the family friend she fished with, but I was never interested in the fishing; I would write or read in the boat while she dug her hands into a bucket of worms or pulled the hooks out of flapping fishes' mouths. This was the same mom who had taken me shopping, taught me how to put on nylons, watched movie musicals, and asked for Vanderbilt perfume every Christmas. As hard as I tried, I couldn't really recognize that mom I knew in the woman who held up fish by their gills while donning a pre-styled wig and a purple life vest.

But now, in this quiet, twilit moment on Lake Windermere, I thought I understood. Fishing gave my mom peace; it gave her time to be with God and her thoughts and nothing else. She could be herself on the lake—not somebody's mom or somebody's patient. On the water, she was just Lisa, doing what she wanted to do, being who she wanted to be.

Maybe that woman in the fishing boat was more my mom than the mother I knew. Beatrix Potter's family hadn't recognized that their daughter was more of a farmer than a socialite. I didn't think my friends knew how sensitive I was about being perceived as a "goody two shoes." Travel had liberated my mother, Beatrix Potter, and me; were my friends and family going to accept the person I had become while I was away? Did I even have the courage to be more free-spirited at home? I looked again at the boats bobbing in

the harbor and the water that reflected the purple peaks and the darkening sky. I drew in a shaky breath and prayed that somehow, some way, I would be able to come back here, or maybe I wouldn't even have to leave. For many tourists visiting the Lake District, Hill Top and its environs represented the values of the idealized English countryside and small town living. England had come to represent something far bolder and bigger for me; England meant adventure, possibility, chance.

As I set up my dorm room at St. Norbert in the fall of my senior year, I taped the postcard I had bought of the sunset on Lake Windermere over my desk. I did my best to be "the new me" that senior year—I went out on weeknights, I expanded my circle of friends, I sang karaoke at a Pittsburgh bar on my twenty-second birthday. In the spring, my Lake Windermere postcard was joined by a yellow Post-It, scribbled on in sympathy by Dr. Karlyn Crowley, another of my professors and Dr. Pennington's fiancé, when I started crying in her office, torn between going to graduate school or starting to teach. "Any choice is a good choice and it will make things possible," she wrote. My mom used to say that "Anything is possible to the person who believes it is possible." I don't think I had ever told Dr. Crowley that.

In the end, my rejected applications to top-tier graduate schools made the decision easier, and it felt right when I started to teach, but I know it was the more familiar and comfortable option. Today, as a teacher at a private school, I feel like I have a reputation to uphold in my community; I can't even bring myself to buy a bottle of wine when one of my students is working the till in the grocery check-out line. Grading is a convenient

excuse that gets me out of the situations that might make me uncomfortable—like bad dates or parties that include lots of people I don't know—but that discomfort might teach me something I couldn't learn otherwise. I went to visit Caitlyn and Owen, who were both pursuing PhDs, in Chicago, and our simple trips to a Thai restaurant and a jazz coffeehouse in Wrigleyville were some of the highlights of my year.

During my first few years of working, I thought maybe I could still run away to England and work there; I marveled at how easy it had been to find my way around when I went back to Lancaster for my flatmates' graduation, the summer after my first year of teaching. But at the end of that summer, I, like Beatrix Potter in her relentless pursuit of the truth about fungi, performed a science experiment of my own. Long plagued by fears about what lurked in my medical future, the same ones I had thought about during my conversation with Margaret, I decided to undergo genetic testing. On the first day of the new school year, I found out that I carried a genetic mutation that puts me at a higher risk of contracting breast cancer, the disease that killed my mother, and ovarian cancer, the disease that killed my grandmother. I started to ponder a question that continues to haunt me: will this mutation, this seemingly alien body, be symbiotic or parasitic?

Knowledge about my health has given me power, but I know that it has also held me back. I have such a good team of doctors in Green Bay that I worry about how long it might take me to find new ones if I moved away or, if I found them, whether I could get a job that would pay enough to cover their care.

But if I travel, everything seems possible again. I don't think it's a coincidence that on a day I sat at home, Margaret's St. Peregrine medal in my pocket and an Ace

bandage across the three post-biopsy stitches in my breast, that I also registered for a four-week study tour of Britain and swore I would go, no matter the cost. That trip was a pilgrimage to the best part of my recent past. It kept me sane. Maybe England is for me what fishing was for my mom.

I am twenty-nine years old; my mom gave birth to me when she was thirty, and she witnessed fifteen years of my life, even fewer years in the lives of my brothers. Because I know about my mutation, I feel like age thirty marks some point when I have to stop pretending that I'm not housing a ticking time bomb and start moving toward a decision about a prophylactic mastectomy or oophorectomy. A distant cousin in Arizona who carries the same genetic mutation just underwent her second surgery after discovering a mass in one of her ovaries. She is in her mid-thirties.

Beatrix Potter's tales are all about characters who seek out adventures—Peter Rabbit and Benjamin Bunny taste the lettuces in MacGregor's garden, Tom Kitten tries to make new friends of Samuel Whiskers and his wife, Jemima Puddleduck enjoys the company of the handsome red-haired gentleman from the forest, Squirrel Nutkin dances around Old Brown Owl's fertile tree—but their adventures come with a price, some sad reminder that the natural world isn't as enchanted as it seems. Peter loses his coat and gets a stomach ache, Benjamin Bunny gets a spanking, Tom Kitten nearly becomes a roly-poly pudding, Jemima loses her eggs, and silly Squirrel Nutkin loses his tail. I am starting to feel like one of those characters. *Here's a wonderful adventure*, Life says. *But it will cost you!*

But what if I ignore the rules? I am the only person holding myself to certain expectations and restrictions. Do I still have the courage to shift my world the way I did when I decided to spend a semester abroad? Beatrix Potter's characters were punished for taking risks, which is ironic, because Potter herself, once she took the biggest risk, never was. Maybe, if I keep traveling, I will be brave enough. Maybe, if I log enough miles by plane or by foot, I will be able to do something extraordinary. I want to believe that if I risk sneaking under the garden gate, I will end up with acres of plenty.

CHAPTER III

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND: "Anne-itude"

Six years after my reflection on the docks near the Ambleside Youth Hostel, I was waking up in the Charlottetown Backpackers Hostel on Prince Edward Island, where the morning newspaper lay on the wide, water-stained planks of the kitchen's farm table with a headline that touted its coincidental story like a carnival barker. In thick, rococo letters, the front page of *The Guardian* urged readers to learn more about "The Battle of the Annes." Below the headline, two cut-out photos of red-haired, freckle-faced actresses in Anne Shirley costumes stood in a cartoon boxing ring. The cut-outs had been snatched from promotional materials for two *Anne of Green Gables* musicals. One Anne grinned while she pulled at her pigtail braids; the other, her red curls pinned back neatly, smiled as demurely as the Mona Lisa, hiding some secret with a twinkle in her eye.

As I waited to warm the bread for my standard-issue hostel breakfast of peanut butter toast, I picked up the newspaper. For the first time ever, downtown Charlottetown was hosting two *Anne of Green Gables* musicals; however despite tourism board officials' support for a potential "*Anne* theatrical zone," Jesse Inman, the CEO of the Confederation Center of the Arts, home to *Anne of Green Gables: The Musical*, the longest-running show in Canada, refused to collaborate with The Guild, the indie theater across the street that was launching its own production of *Anne & Gilbert*, a sequel musical of sorts. Inman and her board worried that The Guild's *Anne* musical might

affect ticket sales for their own show, thereby threatening the revenue stream on which the rest of the Confederation Centre's productions depended. As the summer tourist season began, instead of revving up the welcome wagon, Inman seemed poised to tell The Guild that Charlottetown wasn't big enough for the two of them.

The toaster dinged, I put the paper down, and as I sat to eat my toast and sip some coffee while fellow hostellers filed groggily into the kitchen, I smiled at the serendipity of *The Guardian*'s story. I had a ticket to the evening's performance of *Anne & Gilbert*, and I was about to begin my first full day of touring Prince Edward Island. As a fan (and self-professed "kindred spirit") of Anne Shirley, I wanted to see the island Anne loved and the places that were most special to her creator, L.M. Montgomery. As a scholar, I was eager to know just how important *Anne of Green Gables* was to Prince Edward Island's economy and culture. The story in *The Guardian* seemed to confirm Anne's influence on PEI's tourist economy, but I realized later, after having finished re-reading the *Anne* series later that summer, that the conflict described in the article also inadvertently addressed two important themes of the books: the emotional tug-of-war of coming of age and the struggle to belong. At the heart of "The Battle of the Annes," a conflict about which show "belonged" in Charlottetown, seemed to be a debate about whether or not Anne Shirley the child and Anne Shirley the adult could co-exist. My visit to Prince Edward Island was an attempt to settle a similar debate about myself.

My interest in *Anne of Green Gables* actually began with a musical version of the story, a different show than the two being offered in Charlottetown. I read *Anne of Green*

Gables during the fall of seventh grade after my teachers had announced that all middle school students would be attending a performance of the musical at our local theater company. As I pulled the copy of *Anne of Green Gables* that my godparents had given me from the shelf, I ran a hand over the laminated cardboard cover. A freckled, red-haired girl sat in a buggy looking wistful while a craggy-faced, bearded old man guided his horses forward. I rapped my knuckles on the top of the cover and enjoyed the warm sound; it was like a drum or a heartbeat. My fingers tripped along the pages' curious deckle edges; I had never "felt" a book like this before. I started to read, and I found a friend.

Anne Shirley brightened my gloomy middle school existence. My Catholic grade school, St. Dominic Elementary, had only offered classes for kindergarten to fifth grade, so any students wishing to remain in the parochial system had to attend sixth grade at Holy Family Middle School, the K-8 Catholic school downtown. St. Dominic's was a neighborhood school with a middle-class parish. Holy Family boasted a 150-year-old *grand dame* of a parish church and members with money that was just as old.

Sixth grade was an unhappy time. Though surrounded by friends from St. Dominic, I felt alone and very different from my peers, especially those who had attended Holy Family since kindergarten. I was homesick for my old school. While classmates started trying out new styles and flirting with each other, I wore my dad's sweaters over uniform khaki pants, trying to hide my developing curves. I looked forward to cold or rainy days when we had to stay in the lunchroom at recess. Then, I would curl up in a green leather armchair, a remnant set piece left on the stage at the front of the all-purpose

cafeteria, and read until the bell rang. My journals from that year are filled with desperate wishes to go back to St. Dominic's and escape the changes that seemed to be sweeping through my life, my friends, and even my body.

I wasn't ready to wear spaghetti straps or make-up and argue with my parents like so many girls in my class did. The songs they listened to on the radio in art class embarrassed me, and the language they used seemed vulgar. Even my best friend declared one day in carpool that sixth graders ought to be crude. I was appalled. I missed the wonder and the sweetness and the opportunity for imagination that elementary school had so often provided. I was, at once, too young at heart and too "wise beyond my years." My roles as a big sister and the daughter of a cancer patient had made me a mature old soul who was longing for her innocence.

Enter Anne.

Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* series is a coming-of-age saga. In the first book, Anne Shirley, an eleven-year-old orphan, comes to Avonlea, a fictional town on Prince Edward Island, to live with Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert, a bachelor brother and sister who own Green Gables farm. Anne's arrival is a mistake; the Cuthberts have been prepared to receive a boy, a young man who will help the aging couple with their farm chores. Anne's imaginative nature and winsome charm eventually warms the Cuthberts, and, after a series of mishaps and misunderstandings, Anne finds a home at Green Gables and in Avonlea. At the end of *Anne of Green Gables,* Anne makes the selfless decision to give up a scholarship so she can stay at home and help Marilla tend to Green Gables after Matthew dies. As the series continues, Anne becomes a teacher, goes

to college, publishes her own stories and poems, marries Gilbert Blythe (her childhood rival turned sweetheart), gives birth to seven children (including her first, Joy, a stillbirth), and survives the hardships of life on the home front during World War I. Though Anne is probably in her late forties by the time the series concludes, she is most often portrayed in popular culture as her eleven-year-old self: a girl in red braids, a straw hat, and a patchy dress who has plenty of pluck and a head full of poetry.

While the rest of the girls in my class were falling for the Backstreet Boys, I fell wholeheartedly for Avonlea, the Cuthberts, and plucky, poetic "Anne-with-an-E" Shirley. Classmates used to tease that I was "the human dictionary," and now I had finally found someone who spoke my wistful, out-of-place language! I loved how Anne used words and phrases like "depths of despair" and "scope for the imagination." She was brave and feisty and eloquent, and she found a place for herself in a community that hadn't been so welcoming at first. She even found a boyfriend and husband who was her equal, someone who challenged her and encouraged her dreams. "Gilbert Blythe" became my new term for "soul mate."

I raced through *Anne of Green Gables* and *Anne of Avonlea*, excitedly awaiting the scenes that were so beautifully depicted in the shiny illustrations of my hardcover copies. Soon, I was asking for the rest of the series for Christmases and birthdays. I filled my journals with words like "melancholy" and phrases like "what a queer day!" and a pages-long poem about Anne and Gilbert's romance, which felt more real and inspiring to me than any junior-high crush.

As Anne made Avonlea, once a standoffish and clannish community, her own, I made Holy Family my own, too. My teachers partnered me with a foreign exchange student from South Korea, and we became fast friends, but to help her feel welcome at school, I also had to open up. Slowly, I started to let my classmates get to know me. In eighth grade, I was elected class president, and I didn't have to wear spaghetti straps, argue with my parents, or listen to "KISS" FM to win the election. No longer the lonely girl who had shut herself off from the world in her green armchair at recess, I looked out at my class as I gave my graduation speech and saw thirty-eight friends.

I am sure that hormones, maturity, and time had much to do with my change of heart, but I think Anne Shirley made a difference, too. Anne taught me to take risks (though I still didn't feel ready to walk the ridgepole of a roof as Anne had done on a dare at a church social), she taught me to accept people for who they were, even the crotchety Rachel Lyndes[4] of the world, and to believe in the power of tomorrow, a day that was "fresh with no mistakes in it." Her words echoed my mom's motto about believing in the possible, a statement that kept our whole family going as cancer ravaged her body. I, like millions of other readers for nearly a century before me, joined the cult of Anne Shirley, and Prince Edward Island became my Mecca, perhaps because, as Rosemary Ross Johnston theorizes, "for Montgomery landscape is always *relational*, an intimate part of the subjectivity of her protagonists" (411). I think I was convinced that visiting Green Gables would bring me closer to Anne or make me even more like her. Getting to Prince Edward Island became a life goal, one that my dad, who rolled his eyes

[4] Rachel Lynde, the Cuthberts' busybody neighbor, is one of Anne's first antagonists, though she and Anne grow to appreciate each other as the series progresses.

every time I requested a family trip to PEI, made abundantly clear I would have to accomplish on my own.

Seventeen years after I first read *Anne of Green Gables*, I was finally in a position to go to Prince Edward Island on my own. In July 2013, I stood behind the security post at Boston Logan Airport Terminal B, Gates 1-3, ready to make my dream trip come true. In only eight hours and two short flights, I would be on PEI.

I was one of thousands who visit Prince Edward Island each year in search of Anne Shirley and Green Gables farm. In fact, fans of Montgomery's novels began knocking on the door of the Macneill family farm, a cousin's home that was Montgomery's model for Green Gables, not long after the publication of *Anne of Green Gables* in 1908. By the 1920s, Ernest and Myrtle Webb, descendants of the original Macneill owners, were operating a tea room and calling their house "Green Gables," and in 1936, Canada's national park service purchased the farmhouse and surrounding land to serve as Prince Edward Island National Park (Rubio 484-485), where the Macneill-Webb farm would be one of the major attractions.

As Parks Canada historian James De Jonge explains in "Through the Eyes of Memory: L.M. Montgomery's Cavendish," his essay on the historical and cultural significance of the *Anne of Green Gables* sites, by 1950, Green Gables Heritage Place was open to the public; the preserved property had been decorated to "re-create the fictitious home of Anne Shirley," and it featured a museum and tea-room (256). De Jonge suggests that what is "most striking" about Green Gables Heritage Place is "the long

tradition of depicting Green Gables as the imaginary 1890s farmhouse portrayed in the novel, even though the layout of the interior does not conform precisely with the fictional accounts" (256). Parks Canada's efforts in the 1940s and 1950s to transform the house from a real place where Montgomery's relatives lived for decades after *Anne* was published into the fictional 1890s farmhouse of Montgomery's imagination was, according to De Jonge "in response to […]the public's desire to experience Montgomery's fictional world, rather than the historical reality of Cavendish" (253). Thus, using Montgomery's and "Anne's" words as their guides, Parks Canada employees and members of the Women's Institute of PEI mapped a fictional home onto a real foundation and gently-used, period-appropriate furnishings.

Since 1950, more official and unofficial *Anne* and Montgomery-related tourist sites have emerged on Prince Edward Island. In 2008, when PEI celebrated the centennial of *Anne of Green Gables*'s publication, Tourism PEI announced the creation of an Anne of Green Gables Passport, which encouraged visitors to travel to a variety of museums and businesses that were part of the Anne Partnership (Government of PEI online). Among the sites listed on the passport were two historic schoolhouses at which Montgomery once taught, L.M. Montgomery's birthplace, and the Anne of Green Gables Museum at Silver Bush, the home of Montgomery's Campbell cousins and the site of the inspiration for "The Lake of Shining Waters," Anne's romantic interpretation of the more mundane Barry's Pond.

In addition, *Anne* tourism has spawned resorts and shops across PEI that allude to places and favorite phrases from the series. Visitors driving along PEI's two-lane

highways might spy signs for the Kindred Spirits Country Inn, named after Anne's favorite term for her friends, or Rainbow Valley Campground, named for the Blythe children's favorite place to daydream. Near the Charlottetown docks is a shop called Cordelia's, perhaps an allusion to the name Anne first asks Marilla and Matthew to call her. Anne has even left her mark on island's topography; PEI's Central Coastal Drive, which spans the north-central "lip" of the smile-shaped island, is often marked on visitor maps as "Green Gables Shore."

I learned all about the *Anne* tourist industry while consulting Tourism PEI's "Make It an Anne Vacation" webpage in the spring preceding my trip. As I planned, I realized that, since I had visited Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House the year before (and would be returning there en route to PEI), Green Gables and Prince Edward Island were the last places left on my "must-see" list of literary destinations. Even while touring Potter's Lake District, the Brontes' Haworth, or Dickens's London, Montgomery's PEI had been on my mind. My Canadian friend Caitlyn and I had held mini-marathons of the *Anne* movies in my dorm room at Lancaster University. We had clutched pints of Ben & Jerry's or mugs (yes, mugs) of wine while sighing and laughing at Anne's antics like we were thirteen again. Once I visited Green Gables, where would I go next?

Even more concerning than the question of where I was headed was the question of how I could cope with where I had been. The events of the last few years had given Green Gables and PEI the air of an oracle for me. I was starting to depend on that tiny island to restore my faith in romance, optimism, and possibility.

I had always been an optimist, one who believed that if I could dream it, I could do it. My mom's own positive attitude set an example for me, and her honesty about her condition helped me and my brothers to clearly delineate when, in matters of health, hope could help and when it was, unfortunately, helpless. After mom died, following her gospel of hard work and positivity helped me to earn my place in college, study abroad, and land a plum teaching job with a classroom full of great students. I thought that hard work and positive thinking could help me get anything I wanted, but adulthood was challenging that notion.

Besides continuing to cope with the knowledge of my genetic mutation, I was trying to comfort myself after a series of frustrations and disappointments. First, despite years of swapping mix CDs, getting coffee after work, and spending our summers having up-'til-dawn chats, I could not convince the guy who I thought would be my Gilbert Blythe that we ought to be more than just friends. Then, despite his promise not to sell our childhood home, the home my mom had made, until after my brothers graduated, my dad had moved during a spring when my middle brother, Erik, a senior in college, could barely make it home from Madison to say goodbye. Months later, despite our pleas that Erik try to understand Dad's decision and come home for Christmas for his siblings' sake, Erik continued to treat my father as though he didn't exist. Then, only months after he had purchased a brand new house, the company in which my dad was a partner fired him after twenty-eight years of service, just as he was nearing retirement. Dad's new job led him and my stepmom to a new city, a move that effectively cut ties between my family and the community where I grew up, the community that knew my mom and knew

me as her daughter. Finally, despite my efforts to stay positive at work, I still seemed to end every school year exhausted by the petty politics that crushed any progress our staff made throughout the year.

I was even starting to feel like all the promise I saw in England was really one big liminality hangover, the last sugary dregs of a tea party nearly finished. I had been a "new me" in England because I could live without traditional responsibilities. Eight years back in Wisconsin had reminded me that I had bills to pay, a body to care for, family problems that would not go away, and dreams that were moving farther from my grasp.

In the months leading up to my trip to PEI, I was letting life convince me that my youthful powers of magical thinking were defunct and that I would be stuck in my untethered, overtired, underwhelmed rut for the rest of my days. Were she in my situation, melodramatic Anne would have declared herself living in "the depths of despair," but there was no art or picturesque gloom to my sadness. I was as close to depressed as I had ever been, and I was praying that Anne and her oracle of an island could fix me.

As I planned and researched, I was comforted by the notion that I wasn't the only one seeking solace in literary travel. My hope for "magic" at Green Gables was akin to the sentiment of eighteenth-century tourists who visited the inspirations for their favorite imagined landscapes. Coincidentally, the literature that inspired those tourists also inspired L.M. Montgomery and Anne Shirley.

In *The Literary Tourist,* Nicola Watson describes how the publication of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's eighteenth-century sentimental work, *Julie: ou, La Nouvelle Heloise*, a retelling of the famous romance between Heloise and Abelard, launched pilgrimages to places where, as one anonymous guidebook put it, "'the fancy feels charmed to revel with the creatures of another's imagination'" (132). Inspired by the "eighteenth-century practice of embarking on tours to admire the picturesque," Rousseau set his sweeping romance amidst the already popular landscape of Lake Geneva, Switzerland. Eighteenth-century British literary pilgrims would then pack their multi-volume copies of *Julie* into carriages and ships' quarters with the intention of using Rousseau's text to locate the "spots infused with sentiment" by Rousseau in the real Lake Geneva landscape (132). Soon, other writers, most notably Sir Walter Scott, followed Rousseau's lead and used the dramatic and picturesque landscapes most familiar to them as a stage for the melodrama of imagined men and women.

Romantic poets like Percy and Mary Shelley and Lord Byron were among the travelers who attempted to visit the Lake Geneva of *Julie*. Byron immortalized his visit in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage III,* a poem that eventually surpassed *Julie* as the preferred fictional guidebook to Lake Geneva (Watson 144). As Wendy E. Barry, Margaret Anne Doody, and Mary E. Doody Jones note in their appendix to the annotated edition of *Anne of Green Gables*, Byron was one of Montgomery's favorite poets, and she frequently alludes to his work in her novels (459). For example, when Anne and her "bosom friend" Diana are forcibly separated at school at the request of Diana's mother (because Anne accidentally got Diana drunk on Marilla's currant wine after mistaking it for raspberry

cordial), Montgomery describes the pain of Diana's absence with a quote from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*: "The Caesar's pageant shorn of Brutus' bust/ Did but of Rome's best son remind her more" (*Green Gables* 195). Barry, et al. suggest that Montgomery uses Anne's allusions to Byron or, more frequently, Sir Walter Scott[15], to characterize Anne with a "sense of the dramatic and […] incongruously elevated language" (458). These allusions also demonstrate Montgomery's sophisticated understanding of the relationship between literature and tourism.

A number of scholars have suggested that Montgomery hoped to promote tourism to her favorite landscapes through *Anne of Green Gables*. Like Rousseau and Scott before her, Montgomery filled her novels with romantic depictions of PEI. For example, when Anne encounters Barry's Pond for the first time, it is easy to see why she wants to rename it "The Lake of Shining Waters." From Matthew's buggy, Anne can see:

> Below them was a pond, looking almost like a river so long and winding was it. A bridge spanned it midway and from there to its lower end, where an amber-hued belt of sand-hills shut it from the dark blue gulf beyond, the water was a glory of many shifting hues—the most spiritual shadings of crocus and rose and ethereal green, with other elusive tinting for which no name has ever been found. Above the bridge the pond ran up into fringing groves of fir and maple and lay all darkly translucent in their wavering shadows. Here and there a wild plum leaned out from the bank like a white-clad girl tiptoeing to her own reflection. (61)

In her journals, Montgomery sometimes delighted in the attention that her novels brought to her favorite haunts in Cavendish[16], and her scrapbooks showcase an appreciation for

other writers, like Captain Edwin Smith[17], who promoted the beauty and value of the island as a tourist destination around the time that Montgomery was writing *Anne of Green Gables* (Rubio 259).

Montgomery's own experiences with travel may have helped her understand, as Janice Fiamengo of the University of Ottawa describes it, "the complex interconnections between popular literary texts and their imputed settings" (228). In her essay, "Towards a Theory of the Popular Landscape in *Anne of Green Gables*," Fiamengo explains that, as early as the mid-nineteenth century, Canadian railway companies, like the tourist industries of Switzerland or Scotland, capitalized on tourists' interest in literature, particularly Longfellow's poem *Evangeline* about an Acadian heroine of the Maritimes. Route brochures for Nova Scotia lines described the region as "The Land of Evangeline"[18] (Fiamengo 228). Since Montgomery traveled often by rail, most notably when, at fifteen, she went west to live with her father in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Fiamengo imagines that Montgomery was very familiar with the *Evangeline* campaign as well as the greater "alliance between literature and tourism" (Fiamengo 229).

Montgomery's exposure to advertisements for literary tourism as an adolescent may have led to her participation in the activity as an adult. In 1910, while on a trip to Boston to meet with LC Page, her publisher, Montgomery visited Concord, Massachusetts, and the homes of Louisa May Alcott, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Less than a year later, Maud and her new husband, Ewan MacDonald, spent many days in Scotland and England touring Britain's prime literary destinations. On one of their first stops in Britain, Montgomery wished she could have dreamt over the

relics of Sir Walter Scott's Abbotsford alone, away from the "chattering crowd" and "glib guide" (*Selected Journals* 71). Later, she delighted in the unspoiled charm of J.M. Barrie's Kirremuir (71) and even visited Scott's Lady Ellen's Loch Katrine in the Trossachs (Rubio 154). In northern England, the Macdonalds "call[ed] at Wordsworth's grave" (*Selected Journals* 75) and "motored twenty miles through a very ugly country to Haworth to visit the home and burial place of Charlotte Bronte" (75), and in London, Montgomery expected to see the characters of *Vanity Fair* ("Amelia peering out of a window, looking for George, or perhaps Becky watching for Jos" (76)).

In "L.M. Montgomery's Interior/Exterior Landscapes," Rosemary Ross Johnston suggests that cognitive theories of landscape may explain Montgomery's and others' interest in literary places. Johnston discusses how, because "landscape is background and foreground in which humans are embodied (given body in, given life in), and in which they are embedded (given shape and space)" (409) it assists in the formation of one's identity. Since cognitive scientists believe that "place can only exist in human consciousness through human perception of it" (410) the significance of the perceiver is superior to that of the place. Thus, "setting" is a far more complex trope for literature in which a central character perceives the landscape for readers (like Wordworth's poetry or Scott's romances), and the notion of setting grows even more complex when that character is perceiving a real landscape first perceived by his or her creator (as Anne perceives "Avonlea" (a.k.a. L.M. Montgomery's Cavendish) in *Anne of Green Gables*). When the perceiver takes pains to describe the land for readers, "land is not only the way the condition of the land is seen and perceived, and the philosophical lens through which

this is portrayed; it may also, in a sort of mirroring and replicating, become a reflection of the interiority of the perceiver" (411). Maud's favorite writers and characters helped her to first perceive the places she visited; thus, when she was actually able to travel to the Trossachs, Yorkshire, and London, it was impossible not to separate those literary heroes' presence from their place, just as it is impossible for Montgomery's readers to separate Anne from Prince Edward Island, and they often describe the island as they might describe Anne.

Montgomery's traveling habits, then, reveal some of her own artistic philosophy. Her imaginative and romantic approach to place, both at home and away, spills into her fiction where, as Johnston notes, landscape is "an intimate part" of the identity of her characters (411). As Anne rides toward Green Gables for the first time, she tells Matthew, "'I've always heard that Prince Edward Island is the prettiest place in the world, and I used to imagine I was living here but I never really expected I would. It's delightful when your imaginations come true, isn't it?" (*Green Gables* 54-55). Most of *Anne of Green Gables* is all about Anne's attempts to make her "imaginations come true." She begins by renaming her favorite places along the road to Avonlea, a habit that, Montgomery confessed, Anne inherited from her creator[19]. Under Anne's imaginative spell, a stretch of road once called the "Avenue" becomes the more majestic "White Way of Delight" (58-59), and, given its beauty, Barry's Pond is transformed into "The Lake of Shining Waters." Then, once she has arrived at Green Gables, Anne names the blossoming cherry tree outside her window "The Snow Queen" after a character in one of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales.

Alexander MacLeod, son of noted Canadian author Alistair MacLeod and a professor at Saint Mary's University, emphasizes the relationship between Anne's reading habits and her renaming of Avonlea in his essay "On the Road to Bright River," an exploration of the causes and effects of *Anne of Green Gables* tourism. MacLeod posits that Anne is "the first tourist ever to visit 'Anne's Land'" (142). He suggests that Avonlea and "Anne's Land" are two different places; one, Avonlea, is the place Matthew Cuthbert knows well and can discuss when Anne asks him questions about it; the other, "Anne's Land," or Anne's version of Avonlea, is a place neither Anne nor Matthew has seen before, since it is formed only when Anne maps her "pre-existing romantic ideals" onto the physical landscape she sees from her seat in Matthew's buggy (MacLeod 138). In other words, "Anne interiorizes the beauty of the natural exterior world, dances with it, and reproduces it as she moves through the often less beautiful world of people" (Johnston 411). As Anne spends more time in Avonlea, the map of "Anne's Land" expands to include "The Dryad's Bubble," a spring down by a log bridge, and "Idlewild," Diana and Anne's favorite clearing. Within Anne's first month at Green Gables, she transforms the main road to school into a succession of romantic destinations: Lover's Lane, Willowmere, Violet Vale, and the Birch Path (*Green Gables* 160). Anne and Diana also pretend that the "'[t]he spruce wood over the brook'" (230) near Green Gables is "The Haunted Wood," but their romantic adventure there backfires when neither is brave enough to walk through their imagined land at twilight.

The names of Lover's Lane and The Haunted Wood, like the names Anne gives her favorite places, were influenced by Montgomery's favorite books and stories. I didn't

realize it then, but Anne and Maud Montgomery were already setting me up to be a literary pilgrim when I was in seventh grade. Anne uses big words and re-names places in Avonlea so she can feel more like she is living in one of her favorite books, most of them classic works of British literature. Perhaps the Anglophilia that influenced my decision to study abroad in England was partly the result of my "Anne-glophilia".

Having passed through security at my gate at Boston Logan, I sat on a bench, re-tied my shoelaces, looped my anorak across my waist, and looked for a seat in the Air Canada terminal. A black and red analog screen displayed the flights and gates for the next several hours. Next to my flight and gate, "MONTREAL B3," wasn't a departure time but instead a code: "DLYD."

We were delayed? An attendant at the Air Canada desk announced that the delay was due to an equipment change. I heaved my over-packed carry-on onto my shoulder and approached the customer service desk for help. When I reached the front of the line, the desk attendant confirmed that I would miss my flight to Charlottetown because of the delay to Montreal. She ran a French-tipped fingernail through her long, highlighted hair as she looked at her screen for new flight possibilities. "I can't get you to Charlottetown until the next morning, but we'll put you up in Montreal for the night."

Montreal for the night? I worried. *That's half a day on PEI lost!* The vision of my perfect Anne pilgrimage dimmed.

The desk attendant's nails clicked quickly over her computer keys as she rescheduled my flight. "Have you ever been to Montreal?"

"No, never."

"Oh, you'll love it," she said, the nails fanning themselves out in a gesture of assurance. "It'll be an adventure. Visit the Old Town. Have a nice meal on us." As she explained how I could arrange a hotel voucher once I arrived in Montreal, the printer behind her buzzed as it churned out my new itinerary. *Ok...an adventure.* I thought. *Anne would embrace that adventure, right?*

I appreciated the efficiency and the optimism of the gate attendant and sat down again in the terminal feeling hopeful, ready for the adventure she'd promised. I remembered the lanyards that had circled the attendant's neck. One had "Altitude" running across it in silver letters embroidered on cloud-gray canvas. I had needed to squint to make the word out; at first, I thought the "l" had been a "t," that the lanyard advertised "Attitude." I supposed "Altitude" was some promotional program for frequent flyers or a motto for Air Canada employees, but the word also reminded me of how I ought to think about my ordeal. Onward and upward, right? I had to have the right *attitude,* had to embrace this change and seek out the adventure the gate attendant had suggested. Besides, isn't that what Anne Shirley would have done? Anne found adventure in simply sleeping in someone's spare bedroom[20]! Wouldn't enjoying an adventure in Montreal be a great demonstration of "Anne-itude"?

It seemed like I was going to be in the terminal for a while, so I took my copy of *Anne of the Island* out of my carry-on and began to read: Anne was starting her first year at Redmond College, making friends with Phillipa "Phil" Gordon, a stylish but romantically indecisive socialite, and setting up house with Phil and two other girls at

Patty's Place, a cozy cottage Phil had discovered, nestled at the end of a row of mansions on Spofford Avenue.

As I re-read the series, I was starting to notice that as Anne Shirley matures, she, and readers, must negotiate between the real and the fictive. In *Anne of Green Gables*, precocious, eleven-year-old orphan Anne enlivens Avonlea with her imagination, but what Anne doesn't seem to realize is that her "imaginations" are not really coming true; rather, she is making her "imaginations come true" by re-imagining Avonlea's sights and sounds when they fail to live up to her romantic ideals. Anne's life after *Green Gables* is about figuring out how to be happy in the real world, a world Anne can't always re-imagine.

The first sequel to *Anne of Green Gables*, *Anne of Avonlea,* features a more mature Anne, but her dreaminess and her reluctance to really grow up remain. She still enjoys imagining herself as a "dryad or a wood nymph" and tries to convince Diana that trees have souls (46). Hester Gray's garden, a woodland spot she and Diana discover, is a more grown-up substitute for the Idlewild and Dryad's Bubble of their youth, and much of the novel focuses on Anne's new friendship with Lavender Lewis, an overgrown child and Miss Havisham-like figure whom Anne reunites with her lost love, a man who also happens to be the father of Paul Irving, a sensitive boy who is Anne's heir-apparent in the tradition of transforming Avonlea through imagination. When the town minister's wife talks with Anne about her plans to return to college, she also tries to determine the nature of Anne and Gilbert Blythe's friendship. As Anne speaks, Mrs. Allan realizes that "there

was still far more of the child than of the woman. Anne's heart so far harbored only dreams of friendship and ambition" (152). However, many chapters later, the novel closes with a flirtatious exchange between Anne and Gilbert and the narrator noting that "the page of girlhood had been turned" (326).

Anne of Avonlea, published in 1909, was completed almost before *Anne of Green Gables* was published. The next book in the *Anne* series, *Anne of the Island*, the book I was re-reading at the airport, was published in 1914. By that time, Maud Montgomery had married Ewan Macdonald, moved to Ontario, given birth to one son, and buried a stillborn. Just as her creator left Prince Edward Island before *Anne of the Island* was written, so Anne departs from her beloved PEI at the beginning of the book to go to Redmond College. As she prepares to leave, Anne has a feeling that "[s]he was leaving the home that was so dear to her, and something told her that she was leaving it forever, save as a holiday refuge" (*Island* 17). Montgomery once again alludes to Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* as Anne sets sail:

> "Yes, I feel like Byron's 'Childe Harold'—only it isn't really my 'native shore' that I'm watching," said Anne, winking her gray eyes vigorously. "Nova Scotia is that, I suppose. But one's native shore is the land one loves the best, and that's good old P.E.I. for me."(*Island* 19)

Anne's allusions to *Childe Harold*, a poem about a disillusioned young man who seeks solace in travel, seem to symbolize her own coming-of-age. By the end of the novel, Anne is engaged, and she has told Paul Irving, her former pupil, that the imaginary friends of his youth will disappear as he "'pay[s] the penalty of growing up […] You

must leave fairyland behind you'" (*Island* 153). For an audience used to hearing Anne muse about the fairies and nymphs that must live in Lover's Lane or the Dryad's Bubble, her frank response to Paul is unnerving.

Anne's declaration of love and longing for her "native shore" on the bough of the ship to Redmond and her admission to Paul about the pain of growing up seem to echo the image and sentiment of a series of photographs Montgomery took before her marriage. In her biography of Montgomery, Mary Henley Rubio describes two photographs Maud took on the beaches of PEI, one in 1903 and another in 1911, just a few weeks before her wedding. Rubio explains that in the 1903 photograph,

> Maud has carefully positioned herself …as both a sexual woman and a spiritual being, and in both cases a female form of haunting beauty. She could be a nymph, mermaid, kelpie, part human, or part from the world of faerie. (149-150)

In the 1903 photo, Maud is clad in a gauzy gown, and she leans her hand on her chin to gaze out to sea in the manner of a dreamy teenager. In contrast,

> The second picture of Maud shows none of the sexuality, the longing, the mystery of the other. She is no longer a young woman who yearns for romance, adventure, or even, possibly, a spiritual life of the mind. She has put the nymph-of-the-sea behind her, and the cave is gone.
>
> She is a mature woman who will be a pillar of rectitude, discipline, strength, courage. Maud frames herself as a black silhouette against a white background […]the upright column of powerful woman […] Sadly, there is little sense of possibility in her horizon; there is only the image of a Maud who has

> literally ‘girded up her loins’ and looks as formidable as a nun in a black habit […] She stands alone, poised for the future […] ready to leave one life, one identity, for another. (Rubio 150)

The 1911 photograph of Maud Montgomery captures a woman who, like Anne Shirley on the bough of the ship to Redmond, knows she is about to leave her “native shore” for an as yet undiscovered emotional territory, one that is perhaps more real and raw than she would like to imagine.

Thank goodness for “Anne-itude.” Just as my flight was ready to leave Boston, a storm shut down the airport in Montreal, and then the crew for my flight timed out while we were waiting for the storm to pass, so I was stuck in Bean-town for the night. By eleven o’clock that Friday, six hours after I should have been on PEI and more than twelve hours after I had arrived at Logan Airport, I was instead sharing a late night dinner of wine and quesadillas at a Mexican restaurant in a Comfort Inn. Dining with me were other passengers from my grounded plane: Rémi and Huguette, a French-Canadian neurosurgeon and his real-estate agent wife, and David, a 60-year-old pensioner from Liverpool, with whom I would also be sharing a hotel room. I thought maybe I would go to Canada and find my Gilbert Blythe, but a retired Liverpudlian computer technician was not who I had had in mind, nor was I appreciating Huguette’s insinuations.

“So, Daveed,” Huguette said. “Are you mah-rreed?”

“No, divorced,” David said as he pulled a handkerchief from his pocket to wipe off his glasses and take the shine off his nose. “But I have a partner, Carol.”

"And you, Stef-ah-nee?" There was a mischievous twinkle in her eye.

"No, I'm not seeing anyone," I fumbled. "But that's all right, I'm pretty busy."

"That's all right, I'm pretty busy," had been my response to friends' and relatives' sympathetic reactions to my singledom for the last decade, if not longer. It was as natural as a reflex by now, but it hurt a little to say it on this trip, since I had learned only days ago that my former "Gilbert Blythe" was engaged; he had proposed to his short-term girlfriend, a type of woman I had never imagined he would choose.

But that was the key word, wasn't it? Imagined. My "relationship" with that friend had been imagined. I had wanted it so badly, believed in it so wholeheartedly, that I had conjured more between us than what had actually existed. Like Anne calling Barry's Pond "The Lake of Shining Waters" because she thought the name suited it better, I had renamed our friendship as a romance.

In middle school and high school, I had been a lot like Anne in *Anne of Avonlea*, "harbor[ing] only dreams of friendship and ambition." A very nice boy on my speech team had asked me out on a few dates during my freshman year of high school, but I confessed to my mom that I thought he was too "clingy," and so we stopped going out. After Mom died, I was nervous about dating. I went to the occasional dance with a date and met other boys that I liked, but I was reluctant to share my feelings or make any advances. I was so afraid that I would do the wrong thing, so I "loved vicariously" through my favorite characters in novels or TV shows or movies. As I watched friends pair off in high school and college, I grew certain that those girls knew something I

didn't; those girls had mothers who could teach them about dating and how to make a relationship work. I wasn't at the head of the class anymore.

Then, after college, I met Evan, the guy I thought was "the one," and I felt like there were so many signs pointing to "right for each other" that I could not ignore them, did not have to be afraid that I was wrong. What I knew (or thought I knew) about relationships came mostly from movies, books, and studying other people, and "by the book," Evan and I were perfect for each other: we could talk for hours at a café and then talk for a few more hours on the phone, we had the same quirky interests in music and movies, we had big dreams and were eager to help each other achieve them, and we followed similar career paths. He danced with me at friends' weddings, and he invited his parents to join us when we toured a special exhibit at a museum. Friends and colleagues thought for certain there was something going on between us. My anxiety about my BRCA mutation was eased by the notion that maybe the husband and family I hoped for were in sight. Surely, it was only a matter of time.

Every piece of L.M. Montgomery's purple prose that I had ever read insisted that what I shared with Evan was something special. Whenever I thought about him, I thought about the passage from *Anne of Avonlea* that had set me to writing a poem about Anne and Gilbert so many years ago: "Perhaps, after all, romance did not come into one's life with pomp and blare[…] perhaps it crept to one's side like an old friend through quiet ways" (325). I was content to let our romance unfold slowly, like Anne and Gilbert's had, until my old fears about being at the back of the relationship class resurfaced. Maybe, I thought, he was just sweetly shy and I had not been demonstrative enough. Three years

into our friendship, I decided to call Evan and tell him how I felt, something I had never dared to do with anyone before. There was silence on the line before Evan said he wasn't interested. He just didn't think about me that way and couldn't explain why not. He may never have been my boyfriend, but he broke my heart.

It took almost as many years for me to get over Evan as it had to work up the courage to share my feelings, because, as I explained to a friend through my tears, my romantic mistake made me feel like a fool. My intelligence had always been a comfort and a trump card. Maybe I wasn't as beautiful or flirtatious as some girls, but, like Anne and Laura Ingalls and Jo March, I was smart, and I had felt confident that my brains were going to take me places. In those days following my phone call to Evan, however, I felt like the world's biggest idiot. Not even my smarts could save me. Those girls with moms would have known right away when to quit. They would have realized that what I had been feeling was a crush, an infatuation, an attempt to make my "imaginations" come true. I had believed it was real, so losing it hurt like hell.

I decided that the only way I was going to survive the next go-round with my heart intact was to put a damper on my romantic imagination. If love wanted to find me, it would have to do the searching, and it would have to work hard to prove it was the real thing. I wasn't going to budge, wasn't going to dream or make plans that had no chance of coming true. No more imagining romantic futures for myself. I didn't want to get my hopes up for fear of getting let down again.

I thought that by ignoring entirely any romantic inkling I felt, I was doing myself a favor, becoming a more grounded and realistic adult. In facing the truth about Evan, the

"page" of my girlhood had *definitely* been turned. No more mistaking friendship for love. But was the woman I was becoming too serious for her own good? Evan, who had claimed only a year or so ago that he was not interested in dating me—or anyone, for that matter—was getting married. I was still alone. I saw more of myself in that second photo of the stern, buttoned-up Maud Montgomery than I wanted to admit.

As David and I nervously laughed off Huguette's matchmaking attempt, I looked around the table and realized that our dining party could be the beginning of a good joke: "Two Canadians, an Englishman, and an American walk into a Mexican restaurant…," but there really wasn't a punch line. Instead, a French Canadian couple, a man from Liverpool, and a young woman from Wisconsin walked into a Mexican restaurant and ended up talking about traveling. David, who was a perfect gentleman, and, I learned, a big fan of *Anne of Green Gables* (he had watched the movies with his daughter and actually traveled to PEI), shared stories about his favorite cities in Germany, and Rémi showed us pictures of the salmon he had caught on the Great Lakes. Huguette praised the hospitality in Japan and talked about caring for her infant son while Rémi studied in Paris. Rémi, Huguette, and David shared reminiscences of Madrid, and I recounted my trip to Barcelona.

The hellish day at the airport and even Huguette's question and the memories it had provoked floated away on the chords of our laughter. If my flight had gone smoothly, I thought to myself, I never would have met these three remarkable travelers, and now I couldn't imagine the trip without them. I had lost a day on PEI, but perhaps I had actually started my *Anne of Green Gables* vacation in Boston. After all, the *Anne* books were all

about *communitas*, about Anne making new friends and having adventures with the new people in her life, most of whom—like David, Rémi, and Huguette—were usually twice her age.

A Saturday morning flight to Montreal and an afternoon flight to Charlottetown later, I finally made it to Prince Edward Island, twenty-four hours after I had originally planned to arrive. As the plane descended, I watched the patchwork quilt of the island's rust-colored sands and green fields unfurl and widen. Simple box-shaped churches with triangular steeples and farmhouses with gables and verandas dotted the "patches" here and there. I sat next to a PEI native who smiled as she told me about the "carnival" nature of the island in the summertime. I was finally here, and tomorrow I would begin my tour of Anne's Land. The next morning, having finished reading "The Battle of the Annes" article, I slid the newspaper toward another hosteller. It was time for me to drive to Cavendish. I had decided to spend my first full day on the Island touring the sites I had most hoped to see. I would start with Green Gables Heritage Place.

David, my impromptu roommate from Liverpool, had assured me that PEI was a great place to drive my first rental car. "You'll never see anyone else on the road," he had joked. He was right. The roads were quiet and sun-drenched. Perhaps everything was working out the way it was meant to; had all gone according to my plan, I would have been touring Green Gables yesterday, in the rain.

I approached the ticket booth at the Green Gables Heritage Place visitor center and bought a combined ticket for Green Gables and the Site of L.M. Montgomery's Cavendish Home, the place just across from the road from Macneill-Webb farm where

Montgomery's grandparents' house had once resided. Before we could enter Green Gables, other visitors and I were invited to watch a brief video about Montgomery and her life in Cavendish. Then, there was a short walk up a gravel path (past a gift shop, of course) and through a renovated barn turned museum and snack shop before we could finally see Green Gables, or, as I had to keep reminding myself, the Macneill family farm.

Parks Canada had made every effort to bring the Green Gables of popular memory to life. Outside, the house was painted the rich evergreen and bright white I had always imagined. In "Marilla's" kitchen, I spotted a bottle of raspberry cordial on the third shelf of the pantry and grinned. Upstairs, I walked back and forth through the hallway just so I could keep glancing into "Anne's room," a treasure trove of *Anne* lore. A brown gloria dress with puffed sleeves (like the one Matthew buys for Anne to wear to a recital) hung on the closet door, the pieces of the slate "Anne" broke over Gilbert Blythe's head sat on top of a small chest, and at the foot of "Anne's" bed was the broken carpet bag she used to carry her few belongings from the orphanage to the Bright River Station. Outside, "Anne and Diana" (or, rather, teenage islanders dressed like them) were running sack races and playing clapping games in the garden with younger visitors.

Parks Canada's attention to detail was so sincere. I could see why families enjoyed visiting Green Gables Heritage Place. They took pictures of themselves in a buggy like Matthew's and ate ice cream with Anne in the middle of the afternoon. But, despite Green Gables Heritage Place's efforts, I had to admit that the house did not feel as magical as I had hoped it would. For years, I had imagined getting to Green Gables

and feeling like Anne was right next to me, like some piece of me had finally fallen into place, but a loud, annoying voice in my head kept reminding me that what I was seeing wasn't real. I was walking through a tourist attraction.

I exited the house to make way for another crowd of visitors, families with little girls who wore straw hats with braids made of red yarn popping out on either side. The snack shop in the barn sold bottles of raspberry cordial with a sunny, smiling Anne on the label. It wasn't coming in a tumbler like the one Anne had used to serve Diana, but it *was* raspberry cordial at Green Gables, so I handed over my "toonie" and took a sweet sip. I was starting to feel a little giddier. This bottle was even more "touristy" than Green Gables Heritage Place, but I liked that someone had thought about bottling raspberry cordial. Someone had known that visitors like me would want to drink it at Green Gables.

In the back of the house was the entrance to the "Haunted Wood" trail, a portion of a path that L.M. Montgomery had enjoyed and then immortalized in her novels. Though sipping from a glass bottle while I walked in the woods made me feel as though I was dragging Anne into some kind of delinquent townie territory, I started to walk.

The buzz of other tourists' voices gave way to birdsong as I left the house behind me and moved deeper into the "Haunted Wood." Perhaps at twilight, the path had frightened L.M. Montgomery and Anne, but here, in the late morning light, it was soothing. In front of me, patches of the red-brown path were dappled with sunlight as it shone through the leaves of the trees. It was hard to describe this forest other than to say that it sparkled. The low ferns and tiny streams that lined the path were indeed the perfect places for fairies to hide. I looked ahead at a clearing where tall, white pines stretched to

the sky in a pool of sunlight and thought that maybe Anne was *here*. Or if Anne wasn't here, the feeling that I had whenever I read about Anne was. If, as Rosemary Johnston suggested, literary characters and their landscapes were uniquely bonded, this was the site of that union. The spot was beautiful, the sun felt hopeful, and if I closed my eyes, I could see Anne "dancing" in it. No wonder Montgomery had walked in these woods so often. I slowed down and took measured steps.

Unfortunately, the trail was soon busy with visitors and too narrow to linger in for long. I reached a break in the trail where a stop sign warned visitors to watch out for cars that ran along the rural highway that cut through the path. I squinted as sunlight flooded my vision. Across the road was the next place I planned to visit, the site of L.M. Montgomery's Cavendish home.

While touring Stratford-upon-Avon during her honeymoon trip in Britain, Montgomery indulged in some romantic speculation. Upon seeing the house of Sir Thomas Lucy, infamous for having fined the young Shakespeare for poaching, Montgomery pondered whether, "if he had let Shakespeare off the lad might have gone on sowing his wild oats until […] Shakespeare might have adorned the gallows instead of a stage" (77). To contemporary readers familiar with Montgomery's biography and the sites on PEI now associated with her life, the author's notes about literary travel ring prophetic; as we wander through Green Gables Heritage Place, walk the foundation of Montgomery's Cavendish home, and pause at Maud's grave, we wonder about the "what ifs" of her life.

I had learned from reading Mary Henley Rubio's *The Gift of Wings* that Montgomery had had no control over the preservation of her childhood home, the house where her grandparents had raised Maud since her mother's death when Montgomery was only two years old. The house had also been the place where Montgomery wrote *Anne of Green Gables*. Montgomery knew that when her grandmother passed away, the property would belong to her Uncle John Macneill, a man often at odds with his aging parents. After Lucy Woolner Macneill, Maud's grandmother, died in 1911, Maud, then thirty-seven, vacated the house and lived at the "Green Gables" Macneill farm until her wedding a few months later.

Montgomery's grandmother had been a fastidious housekeeper, but her son John let the house fall into disrepair. Perhaps some of John Macneill's seeming distaste for the property came from the constant "pestering" he received from tourists and pilgrims hoping to get a glimpse of Lucy Maud Montgomery's home in the years following *Anne of Green Gables*'s publication. In *The Gift of Wings*, Rubio describes how "hordes of sightseers trespass[ed] all over the Macneill homestead, peering into the windows of the empty house and trampling all over his planted fields; from Uncle John F.'s point of view, a maddening invasion of property" (286-87). The house slowly deteriorated until John tore the crumbling structure down in 1920, perhaps as a reaction to "Maud's adulation by the reading public" (287). He abandoned the site to its natural state (De Jonge 260-61). Rubio notes that for Maud, who was particularly sensitive to change, losing such an important place was a very difficult blow (287).

By the 1940s, the site of Montgomery's Cavendish home had ceased to be a place of literary pilgrimage, but in the 1980s, descendants of John Macneill, now aware of the sacred nature of the spot thanks to the publications of their ancestor's journals, began efforts to re-open the site as a "heritage attraction" (De Jonge 261-262). Now, James De Jonge suggests

> [T]he site derives its essential values as a ruin […] ruins provide a unique experience for visitors by vividly depicting the passage of time and encouraging reflection on an earlier period […] they can challenge assumptions that the integrity and significance of heritage sites require the survival of intact buildings. (262)

The more I studied the plaques en route to the site of Montgomery's Cavendish home and the square hole in the ground, or "ruin," that marked the site, the more my feelings about Green Gables Heritage Place started to make sense. Green Gables Heritage Place was merely an "imagination come true," as much a fantasy as the rest of "Anne's Land." The real place where Anne came into being, I realized, no longer existed. Yes, the Macneill-Webb farm had inspired Montgomery's physical descriptions of the Cuthberts' Green Gables, but the home where *Anne of Green Gables* was born, Lucy Maud Montgomery's Cavendish home, had been destroyed long ago.

"It gives a strange reality to the books of theirs which I have read to see those places where they once lived and labored," Montgomery wrote after touring the homes of Concord's transcendentalists in 1910 (*Complete Journals 1901-1911* 331-332). Montgomery's comment demonstrates the jarring effects that traveling to the real places

one has previously only imagined can produce. That Montgomery offered no further explanation of her thoughts seems to affirm the ineffable nature of that experience. Montgomery's use of "strange" is particularly interesting, since the rest of the journal entry does not clarify whether her visits to Alcott's, Emerson's, and Hawthorne's houses made the authors' books seem more or less real to her. Did visiting Alcott's house make *Little Women* more familiar? Or did it shatter Montgomery's vision of the March family home?

After the dizzying delight of my raspberry-cordial-fueled Haunted Wood fantasy, seeing the hollowed out earth that was the foundation of Montgomery's Cavendish home was strange and sobering. Behind me, a rolling green field stretched out beneath the sunlight, lined by a crude wooden fence. I could see what Anne would call "scope for imagination" in that landscape. I thought Montgomery, who would have stared out her bedroom window at that view, must have, too. The realization was bittersweet. Montgomery was never able to go back to her childhood home, could never have sat and gazed through her window with the smells of home and the touch of familiar furniture around her, and now I couldn't either. I wondered if she thought her house defined her the way I was certain that my childhood home defined me. All three of my brothers' fiancés had seen the house where we kids had grown up; I had dreamed of bringing Evan, and, later, some actual boyfriend or fiancé, there, too. I thought it would help me explain things about myself that I couldn't put into words. *Here,* I would point to a picture from the family portrait gallery on the bedroom hallway wall, *that's a picture of my mom, and that's an old photograph of my great-grandparents on the day they were married*. *Here,* I

would tread down the basement stairs, *this is where my brothers and I spent rainy summer afternoons building Lego houses and putting on cooking shows*. *This room*, I would say, gesturing into the doorway of my bedroom, *is where I did all of my dreaming; here is where I hoped for you*.

Maybe too many years of touring old houses had led me to believe, naively, that they unlocked something about their inhabitants. Then again, I had also grown up with *Anne of Green Gables*, and, as Rosemary Johnston explains,

> Montgomery's landscapes, cosmic as they are, have as their central locus the idea of home, and the powerful associations of coming home, finding home, making home, are part of her ideology of home as ontological beingness. Home is the center from which the perceiving subject connects or is connected to, in varying degrees, a wider context […] at the core of the idea of a "home" is a moral expectation of personal significance and care, a reinforcement of the integrity of subjectivity. (411)

The answer was there in Montgomery's titles: *Anne of Green Gables, Anne of Avonlea, Anne of the Island, Anne of the Windy Poplars, Anne of Ingleside*. Every place helped explain who Anne was and what she believed. I was Stefanie of 2308 West Mark Drive. I thought bringing a boyfriend or a husband or a family to the blue house with the black shutters would have given me the incentive to talk about my past, offered a way to start explaining just how life-altering my mother's death had been. Now, the house was sold, my family had moved out of it, and whoever my "Gilbert Blythe" turned out to be would

never know the house the way I had known it. Even the magic of Prince Edward Island couldn't change that. Maud and I had more in common than I thought.

Maud Montgomery's move out of her grandmother's house and her departure for her honeymoon trip to Great Britain's literary landscapes marked the end of her life on Prince Edward Island and, in many ways, the end of a certain innocence. Though Montgomery would continue to gain popularity as a novelist, start the family she had always wanted, make good friends in a number of new communities, and earn international recognition for her contributions to Canadian culture, she would also face a bitter legal battle with a publisher, grow estranged from her husband, suffer from severe bouts of depression, watch her eldest son spiral into a life of crime and lechery, and, as has been recently revealed, end her own life by overdosing on prescription medication. It's almost as if she believed that, instead of turning the page of girlhood, she should have closed the book.

I walked to Montgomery's grave in the cemetery that bordered the rural highway between Green Gables Heritage Place and the site of the Cavendish home and pondered her brick-colored tombstone. If seventh-grade Stefanie had visited these sites, she would have been content with their constructed magic. She would have stayed as delighted as I felt in the Haunted Wood. Twenty-eight-year-old Stefanie could not stop herself from imagining what Montgomery must have felt every time she came home to the island, the disappointment at seeing a place once familiar slowly sinking back into the earth, the

desire to re-live a time that seemed easier and more full of possibilities. I mapped Montgomery's life onto my own.

Rubio suggests that the more Maud visited her hometown, the more she began to realize that the PEI she loved "was as much a time as a place" (317). I was starting to feel the same way about my childhood home in Sheboygan and even the experience I had anticipated while planning my trip to PEI. The island could never be what I had imagined in seventh grade. My expectations for Prince Edward Island had been irrationally high. The trip I had envisioned was really a visit to a place twice-imagined. I wanted to see Anne's re-imagination of an already imaginary place. Green Gables Heritage Place takes pains to bring Anne Shirley to life, but I knew she wasn't there; the significant objects of her early life and the visitors who see them still pined for her arrival. I had felt like Anne was with me in The Haunted Wood, but the plaques near the Site of Lucy Maud Montgomery's Cavendish Home reminded me that Anne was really a repository for Maud Montgomery's early memories, and the absence of Montgomery's cherished home symbolized Maud's and my inability to outwit the law, or death, or time.

Throughout the *Anne* series, Anne refers to those who understand and empathize with her as her "kindred spirits," a term she borrows from Thomas Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" (Barry 458). Though Anne uses the term quite joyfully, it originates from a melancholy place. In Gray's poem[21], a kindred spirit is one "who can share mindfulness of the dead or share sympathy for one's loss" (458). Thinking about that definition made me wonder if Anne, whose pluck makes her seem invulnerable for much of *Anne of Green Gables*, was really more of a lost little girl than I had realized.

Since she meets Matthew and Marilla so early in the book, it's easy to forget that Anne is an orphan. She has lost her father…she has lost her mother. Very few people can say they understand that tragedy and mean it. Anne's imaginative language, then, "is part of her defence against a world that has so far treated her cruelly" (Ahmansson 377). Maybe calling friends her "kindred spirits" is a chance for Anne to open her heart; a way to say, "I need someone who understands me" when those words are too hard to say. My journey to visit Anne, a kindred spirit, had led me to another, Maud Montgomery.

Upon returning to Charlottetown after my day at Green Gables, I walked to The Guild for a performance of *Anne & Gilbert,* one of the contenders in "The Battle of the Annes." The critic in me recognized that the script took lots of liberties with Montgomery's story, especially when it came to building chemistry between Anne and Gilbert, but I think the musical's slightly modernized Anne was the one I needed to see. Here was an Anne who was grappling with the same romantic and emotional frustrations that "turning the page of girlhood" had wrought for me. She watched her good friends get married and start new lives that were separate and different from her own. She struggled to rectify her fantasy of love with its more difficult realities. She was plagued by the question of whether her mother could have helped her navigate all of these changes.

The show's "11 o'clock number" was a solo for Anne, a moment I thought the show had manufactured until I read about it days later in the middle of *Anne of the Island*. In the scene, while at college, Anne receives a packet of letters that her late parents left

behind in their old house in Bolingbroke, Nova Scotia. She starts to read the letters and learns about their love for each other and for her, and she sings:

> Forever in my life
>
> I'm different
>
> I'm the daughter of
>
> a kind of love
>
> that never goes astray
>
> Forever in my life
>
> I'll treasure these letters
>
> Letters from the past
>
> Of lasting love
>
> Enough to fill each day
>
> So it's in me to love a man that way. (112)

In the show, as the lyrics suggest, receiving the letters helps Anne realize how much she loves Gilbert. In the book, reading her parents' letters makes Anne feel like she is not an orphan anymore. In my seat in the darkened theater, I started to weep. I had blamed the hurt I felt after Evan's rejection and the grief over losing my childhood home on my romantic imagination; I thought I had stuffed my head too full of *Anne* and her fellow heroines to recognize what was real and what was imagined. I thought I was alone on my journey to learn about what love was like and how to find it or how to build a new home for myself, but here was Anne, reminding me that the only love I needed to worry about had been "forever in my life." To put a damper on my romantic imagination, to stop

believing in the best possible outcome, was to deny who I really was. I had "Anne-itude," damn it, and a smart girl would not continue to try to lose it.

Mary Henley Rubio sees Montgomery's own struggles reflected in the *Anne* books published after her marriage, particularly *Anne of Ingleside*, the last *Anne* book published in Montgomery's lifetime and the sixth book chronologically in the series[22]. *Anne of Ingleside* has its sharp edges, but as I re-read the book after returning home from Prince Edward Island, I realized that it is perhaps more about *longing* than *loathing*. *Anne of Ingleside* ends with Anne wandering through her house in the moonlight, gazing on her sleeping children and realizing that soon, they will be growing up. She thinks about the second honeymoon trip she and Gilbert are about to take, one that distinctly mirrors the honeymoon Montgomery took with Ewan Macdonald. The Blythes plan to go to Europe and see "the far dim hills of Scotland," "the church by the Avon where Shakespeare slept," and "sorrowful rivers floating by dead empires" (274). Her thoughts are wistful and poetic, the musings of a younger Anne, but they are tinged with her creator's melancholy; all Anne anticipates seeing are reminders of mortality. There is a sense here that a sadder but wiser Anne sees the ruins she is about to explore for what they are: shells of past lives, monuments to the power of time, places that evoke magic when imagined but which lack it upon visitation.

However, amidst Anne's melancholic musing is a glimmer of hope, the reparative gift of Montgomery's nostalgic novels. In the last paragraph of *Anne of Ingleside*, the narrator describes how Anne, in her white nightgown and long red braid, has the look of a

young Anne about her, "That inward glow was still shining through her" (*Ingleside* 274). Despite the hardships thrown Anne's way—the death of her first child, the invasion of her home by Gilbert's needling aunt, the suspicion that Gilbert has feelings for an old flame, Christine—her spark hasn't died. It is difficult for the reader to tell if the narrator alone is assuring readers of Anne's "Anne-ness" or if Anne has caught a glimpse of herself and sees her own "Anne-itude" in the mirror.

It seems counterintuitive, that being disappointed by one's "oracle" can actually lead to epiphany, but that's what happened on PEI. Green Gables and Montgomery's Cavendish home were not what I expected, but they, and the rest of what I saw on the island, were what I needed. In her description of the *poetics* of Montgomery's landscapes, Johnston explains that "Landscape is *read* by Montgomery, and then *written* by her, as being interior and exterior; relational; a powerful dimension of home; the representation and consolation and edification of inner secret space; and profoundly spiritual" (413). My pilgrimage to the landscape of PEI, including all of its surprises—the delay in Boston, the melancholy at Green Gables, the tears at *Anne & Gilbert*—was a "spirit journey," as Colleen, a fellow *Anne* pilgrim I had met while walking in the Haunted Wood, described it in the Christmas card I received from her months later.

The day after I wept in my seat at *Anne & Gilbert*, I drove, on a whim, to Basin Head Beach on the island's eastern shore. I had read about the beach's famous "singing sands" and wanted to see if the rumors were true. As I walked along the beach, I pressed my toes into the hot, white sand and heard it squeak and sing. I smiled. To my right were

red cliffs like the ones I had seen while flying into PEI. I watched a family crawl up the rocks to rest in an alcove of the cliff as I stepped into the warm, clear water. I closed my eyes and tried to picture young Maud on the rocks, all full of hope and possibility, still the nymph of the island. I felt more like her now than the older, buttoned-up Maud standing sternly on the shore. I hadn't met Anne of Green Gables or even Gilbert Blythe, but I had made it to PEI, and now that felt like miracle enough. *I'm coming back here*, I thought, more a statement of certainty than a vow. *I know it*.

A few weeks after I returned home from Prince Edward Island, I started to make a scrapbook of my trip. In the fat, white envelopes of my photos I found a "selfie" from the Haunted Wood, a picture of my toes in the sand at Basin Head, and a snapshot of the red cliffs I had admired. Deeper in the stack was a picture that I think I like even more. It is a photo I took while visiting Silver Bush, the home of Montgomery's Campbell cousins and the site of the "Lake of Shining Waters." Brochures for the house advertise that it owns "Anne's Enchanted Bookcase," the cupboard that inspired Montgomery to write about "Katie Maurice," Anne's imaginary "mirror friend," which is, in reality, Anne's reflection. At first glance, this new favorite photo is just a fuzzy picture of a tea set in that book case, but when I look closely, I can see what I tried to take the picture of: my own reflection in the glass, my "Katie Maurice." In that moment of indulging my romantic imagination, this woman for whom the page of girlhood has been turned is smiling, ear to ear.

For the casual traveler, "Anne's Land" is a tourist destination, a map of places to see, things to do, and items to buy in order to live like Anne. But for the literary pilgrim

in search of her “Anne-itude,” “Anne’s Land” is not a landscape or a series of houses, not a spot on a map or a trail in wood; rather, it is, like Anne’s “Enchanted Bookcase,” a mirror into the soul, a symbol of the adult literary pilgrim’s search for the “self-who-used-to-be” and the opportunity to welcome her home.

CHAPTER IV

CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS: A Literary Pilgrim's Progress

If its preservation of the homes and graves of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Alcott is not enough to prove Concord, Massachusetts's devotion to literature, then surely the location of its library proves it. The stately brick temple fronted by white-washed columns stands on a lush lawn at the fork in the road between Main Street and Sudbury Road, two of the city's main thoroughfares. From above, the two roads form an arrow pointing to the library, like a treasure map where "V" marks the spot. My visit to the Concord Free Public Library and its surrounding town felt like a treasure hunt, a search for the riches buried in library archives and museums' back rooms, but I was not looking for doubloons or diamonds, I was looking for words.

I opened one of the library's heavy doors and followed the signs directing me to the special collections room in the basement. There, the grandeur of the library's vaulted ceiling and the chatter of families seeking relief from the humid July afternoon were replaced by plain, mustard-colored walls and the quiet hum of computers, copy machines, and people at work. Given what I was looking for, I thought the Special Collections room would be grander, like the elaborate wood and marble reading rooms of the British Museum or the Library of Congress, but this room was practical, filled by institutional tables, a few worn armchairs, and plenty of carefully labeled boxes and file folders. When I made my request to the librarian, she was warm and genial, not at all the stalwart

and stony guardian I had expected. I sat down in a folding chair at one of the rectangular tables and waited for her to retrieve my treasure. Five minutes later, she returned with a plain manila folder. Inside it, pressed neatly between UV-protective plastic sheets, were blue-gray papers covered in a fading brown scrawl. A chapter of the manuscript of *Little Women* was in my hands.

No book is as tightly woven into the fabric of my girlhood, perhaps my whole life, as *Little Women*. As a five-year-old, I read a Children's Illustrated Classics edition of the novel that my godmother had given to me for Christmas and loved *Little Women* because it was a source of pride: it was my first novel, a book that a lot of women I admired—my godmother, my cousins, my great-aunt Louise, my mother—had also loved, so having my own copy made me feel like part of a special club. Later, when I was a fourth-grader watching the 1994 film adaptation at my elementary school, the story awakened me to the heart's complexities. My girlfriends and I marveled at Jo's refusal of Laurie, and I began to understand, for the first time, that true love does not always follow a linear narrative (and rarely comes in a Christian Bale shaped package). Finally, as a high school and college student, I saw *Little Women* as a subversive feminist text, a celebration of what women (and, in particular, one woman writer) could do that was cleverly cloaked in seemingly innocuous domestic detail. Louisa May Alcott became one of my heroes, and I paid tribute to her in a speech that earned me a first place trophy at a state forensics competition. *Little Women* grew with me, and each time I returned to it, I learned something new about the March sisters and about myself.

I know now that my experience of *Little Women* is not singular. Rather, generations of American readers (and even readers worldwide[23]) have celebrated how *Little Women* comforted, inspired, and enlivened them. Scholars Eve Kornfeld and Susan Jackson argue that *Little Women* is a template, one of the first female *bildungsromans*, a hybrid of the normally male-dominated coming-of-age novel and domestic fiction (139). Susan Gannon suggests *Little Women* remains widely read because the novel "has demonstrated the mysterious power to explain its readers to themselves" in that it addresses "the unbearable conflict between duty and aspiration […] in such vivid terms that generations of American girls have seen the story as peculiarly their own" (121). Elaine Showalter and Madelon Bedell call *Little Women* "'*the* American female myth'" (*Sister's Choice* 42), and the novel continues to resonate in popular culture so that even the dimwitted Joey Tribbiani of *Friends* is familiar with it. [24]

As I returned to the novel as a graduate student in 2013, I was hoping to explain my pilgrimage to Concord, particularly Orchard House, the home in Concord where Alcott wrote *Little Women*. As I reread *Little Women* and gazed at the manuscript of "Our Foreign Correspondent," an epistolary chapter of *Little Women* about Amy March's adventures in Europe, I was beginning to appreciate the power of *Little Women*'s central metaphor. Life, Alcott asserts, is a pilgrimage, and to experience the "inward movement of the heart" (Turner 8), you have to be willing to pick up your feet.

Alcott establishes her pilgrimage metaphor in her epigraph to *Little Women*. "[…O]n one of the first pages, as a sort of motto, we fancy having the lines I send, as they give some clue to the plan of the story" (*Selected Letters* 116) she wrote to Thomas

Niles, her publisher, in 1868. The lines she sent were these, taken from the introduction to the second part of John Bunyan's novel, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, one of her family's favorite books:

> 'Go then, my little Book, and show to all
> That entertain, and bid thee welcome shall,
> What thou dost keep close shut up in thy breast;
> And wish what thou dost show them may be blest
> To them for good, may make them choose to be
> Pilgrims better, by far, than thee or me.
> ……
> For little tripping maids may follow God
> Along the ways which saintly feet have trod.' (*Little Women* 10)

The Pilgrim's Progress, an allegory in two parts, is a Christian *bildungsroman.* The first part tells the story of a pilgrim named Christian who travels from the City of Destruction, his very earthly dwelling, to the Celestial City, the kingdom of Heaven, in a dream. Along the way, he must cross the "Slough of Despond," "Hill of Difficulty," and "The Valley of the Shadow"; he also gains respite in a "Palace Beautiful," and he encounters spiritual guides like Evangelist and Faithful, who keep him on the right path. The second part of the allegory follows the journey of Christian's wife, Christiana, one of the "tripping maids" to whom Bunyan's introduction refers, as she makes a similar pilgrimage.

Alcott's allusions to *The Pilgrim's Progress* continue in *Little Women*'s first chapter, "Playing Pilgrims," Here, wise Marmee March provides a moral frame for her teenage daughters' adventures by encouraging them to take up an old game in a new way:

> "Do you remember how you used to play Pilgrim's Progress when you were little things? Nothing delighted you more than to have me tie my piece-bags on your backs for burdens, give you hats and sticks, and rolls of paper, and let you travel through the house from the cellar, which was the City of Destruction, up, up, to the house-top, where you had all the lovely things you could collect to make a Celestial City." (*Little Women* 17)

When her daughters object to the relevance of their old game in their new lives as young women, Marmee admonishes:

> "We are never too old for this, my dear, because it is a play we are playing all the time in one way or another. Our burdens are here, our road is before us, and the longing for goodness and happiness is the guide that leads us through many troubles and mistakes to the peace which is a true Celestial City. Now, my little pilgrims, suppose you begin again, not in play, but in earnest, and see how far on you can get […]" (*Little Women* 18)

Marmee's advice to her daughters transforms *Little Women* from a quaint domestic, coming-of-age drama into a spiritual quest[25], one that equates physical journey-making with psychological and spiritual maturation. The sisters' adventures, which can be read as isolated stories of girlhood feats and foibles, are instead parts of a life-long pilgrimage

toward the "Celestial Cities" of their own invention: the "castles in the air" of their girlhood and the happy homes they hope to make as adults.

Part of Jo March's pilgrimage involves finding her writing voice. The novel is as much the story of her coming-of-age as it is her development as an artist. Jo's "castle in the air" involves a stable full of wild steeds, piles of books, and "'a magic inkstand'" that brings fame to her every word. "I want to do something splendid before I go to my castle,—something heroic, or wonderful,—that won't be forgotten after I'm dead,'" she tells Laurie and her sisters. "'I've got the key to my castle in the air; but whether I can unlock the door, remains to be seen'" (*Little Women* 118). Jo's "key" is ambition; she is prolifically literary, spinning stories late into the night and broadcasting her writerly moods with the position of a favorite pillow.

After I read about Jo in *Little Women*, I had a model for what being a writer might mean. As Anne Trubek writes in *A Skeptic's Guide to Writer's Houses*, "the most common cultural image recalled with the phrase 'the author' is the Romantic genius, alone, in a garret, writing furiously" (Trubek 55). In *Little Women*, Jo typifies that stereotype in her "'scribbling suit'" and special writer's cap and her habit of "'fall[ing] into a vortex'" when a "writing fit came on" (*Little Women* 211). Jo's writing habits echo her creator's. In her own writing "vortices," Alcott wrote for so long and pressed so hard on her pen that she was forced to write with both hands in order to let one rest from the pressure. Her description of her writing process in her journals mirror those she attributes to Jo, who

> gave herself up to [writing] with entire abandon, and led a blissful life, unconscious of want, care, or bad weather, while she sat safe and happy in an imaginary world, full of friends almost as real and dear to her as any in the flesh. Sleep forsook her eyes, meals stood untasted, day and night were all too short to enjoy the happiness which blessed her only at such times, and made these hours worth living, even if they bore no other fruit. (*Little Women* 211)

How many other young women, like me, read that passage and thrilled at the notion that Jo, our heroine, knew what it felt like to be consumed by the creative impulse? The poetry I wrote in sixth grade study hall did not feel so foolish when I knew that Jo could shut away the world and write her verses. And even when I was old enough to cringe at the purple prose of my middle school years, I still felt a secret thrill as, fueled by bottomless cups of coffee and care package cookies, I worked long into the night on term papers under the light of my desk lamp, feeling like Jo and Louisa May Alcott as they wrote by candlelight, with my oversized college sweatshirt as my own "scribbling suit."

Jo March exemplifies another trait of the Romantic genius, a deep desire to travel and pay homage to the masters of her craft. In the first half of *Little Women*, Jo delights in the places she can travel to in books, and the dramas and stories she writes usually surround foreign characters in far-off places. She and her sisters gravitate to Laurie because he is a bit of an exotic, since his mother was an Italian musician and he is rumored to have been reared in an opera house. Therefore when Amy, rather than Jo, is chosen to accompany their Aunt Carrol on her Grand Tour of Europe, Jo is devastated. "'Oh, mother! she's too young,'" she cries to Marmee. "'[I]t's my turn first; I've wanted

it so long—it would do me so much good, and be so altogether splendid—I *must* go'" (243). A few chapters later, readers learn that Jo's envy stems not only from her long interest in Europe but also her own restlessness. Almost twenty and tired of her small life at home, she confesses to Marmee that she needs "'stirring up,'" and wants to "'hop a little way and try my wings'" (259).

Jo "hops" to New York, where she intends to "'see and hear new things, get new ideas, and, even if I haven't much time there, […] bring home quantities of materials for my rubbish'" (260) while working as a governess in a family friend's boarding house. While in New York, Jo experiences great success with the publication of her sensation stories, and she also visits a literary salon and is surprised to discover "that the great creatures" of her favorite writers, poets, and artists, "were only men and women, after all" who devour their suppers like beasts, indulge in "two decanters with the regularity of a pendulum," flirt obnoxiously, and are altogether, disappointingly, ordinary (277). When a new friend, Professor Bhaer, inadvertently makes her ashamed of writing tales that wallow so far beneath her family's moral territory, Jo resolves to "cork up her inkstand" (281) until she can write better stories that are truer to her nature and her family's creed.

Jo's and Amy's travel experiences were inspired by Alcott's own voyages. In November 1862, Alcott turned thirty, the minimum age for women wishing to serve in the Union army nursing corps. "I want new experiences, and am sure to get 'em if I go," she said of her enlistment in her journal (110). Though her tenure as a nurse was cut short when she contracted typhus in early 1863, her account of life at the Union Hotel Hospital in Washington, D.C., was nonetheless vivid and heartrending. The publishers of

Commonwealth, an antislavery magazine, asked Alcott to publish her letters home from the hospital as a series. Alcott transformed the letters into *Hospital Sketches*, the slightly fictionalized account of "Nurse Tribulation Periwinkle," her beleaguered colleagues, and their brave patients. After years of publishing sensational horror tales under a *nom de plume* so as to save her friends and family from embarrassment, Alcott's *Hospital Sketches*, based in the horrifying reality of her nursing experience, made Alcott an admired household name. Then, in 1865, just three years before publishing *Little Women*, Alcott accompanied a wealthy brother and sister on their Grand Tour. While traveling, Alcott tried to visit the birthplace of one of her idols, Goethe, in Frankfurt, Germany[26], and she also delighted in the streets of literary London. "Went to Parks, Westminster Abbey, & some of the famous streets. I felt as if I'd got into a novel while going about in the places I'd read so much of," she wrote in her journals (141), and she wrote home to her father that "One cannot describe [Westminster] Abbey, it is too vast but one does not forget it and feels the richer all his live [sic], for having seen it" (*Selected Letters* 111). Alcott's D.C. experience became Jo March's adventure in New York, while her Grand Tour supplied the details for Amy March's letters home in "Our Foreign Correspondent," the manuscript I was looking at in the basement of The Concord Free Public Library.

My hands shook as I gently turned each page of the manuscript. My heart was pounding. I looked around the room and cursed myself for being ill-prepared. Other visitors had their laptops and reference books with them. I had only a notebook and a pencil. I should have brought my copy of *Little Women* along to compare the texts, but when I had packed my bag before going to the library, all I could think about was holding

the manuscript. Besides, as I looked at the handwritten copy of "Our Foreign Correspondent," I had to struggle to calm my overexcited brain so I could process what I was seeing; I doubt I would have been able to take notes or make comparisons. I was transfixed by the curt brown lines, the flat and pointed letters, the work of a woman I had revered all my life, my model for what it meant to be a writer, resting there in my hands.

Alcott's handwriting, like her personality, was both striking and sensible; in the sharp-edged words which seemed to have been written so quickly that some just looked like jagged lines, I saw the practical Alcott, a woman who wrote to live; she did not have the luxury of living to write. During Alcott's childhood, her father, Bronson Alcott, had been a model philosopher rather than a model provider. When the Alcotts first moved to Hillside in Concord when Louisa was twelve, the family had yet to live in one house for longer than a year since Bronson's projects—an integrated co-educational school, an experimental utopian community—earned little money and often failed. The task of earning enough to feed and clothe their family was often left to Louisa's mother, Abba May Alcott, and, when they were old enough, Louisa and her three sisters, Anna, Elizabeth (Lizzie), and May.

By the time she was thirteen, Louisa could appreciate both her mother's efforts and her own potential to relieve her of her burdens. She wrote in her journal in 1846:

> I have made a plan for my life […] People think I'm wild and queer, but Mother understands and helps me. I have not told any one about my plan, but I'm going to *be* good. I've made so many resolutions, and written sad notes, and cried over my sins, and it does n't seem to do any good! Now I'm going to *work,* really, for I

> feel a true desire to improve, and be a help and comfort, not a care and sorrow, to my dear mother. (*Journals* 59)

Just four years later, Louisa again marveled in her journals at the work of her mother, "a very brave, good woman" and dreamed of having "a lovely, quiet home for her, with no debts or troubles to burden her" (*Journals* 63). So, like Jo, who prides herself on the way her fairy stories and potboilers fund Beth's constitutional trips to the seaside, Alcott often celebrated how the products of her writing vortices supplied Abba with the comforts she had so often hoped to give her when she was young.[27] In fact, the family's long residence at Orchard House, the home that is now a museum devoted to the Alcotts' lives and legacy, was secured by *Little Women*. The popular novel and its sequels earned Alcott enough money to keep her family in the house until she and her parents grew too ill to care for it.

In preparation for my trip to Concord, I had read biographies of Alcott, and in those pages, I had learned about the deep bond that Abba and Louisa Alcott shared. Abba encouraged her daughters' literary ambitions. Eve LaPlante, a distant descendant of Abigail's May relatives, writes in her biography of Alcott and her mother, *Marmee and Louisa* about how Abba purchased a pen for Louisa for her fourteenth birthday. "The message she wrote on the birthday card," La Plante observes upon reading the card in the Alcotts' collected papers, "reiterated their bond":

> 'Dearest, accept from your mother this pen and for her sake as well as your own use it freely and worthily.'…'Let each day of this your 15th year testify to some good word or work; and let your Diary receive a record of the same…May eternal

> love sustain you, Infinite Wisdom guide you, [and] may the sweetest Peace reward you. Mother.' (La Plante 139)

Although both Abba and Bronson Alcott supported their second daughter's talent for writing, Abba recognized that writing was essential to Louisa's being, a means of quieting her personal demons and exercising her often restless spirit.

Abba and Louisa's relationship reminded me a lot of my relationship with my mom. My mom, like Abba Alcott, fostered my interest in writing and understood how serious I was about books. When I brought home those stories about the homesick alien and motherless ducklings in first grade, she had praised them and shared them with friends and family. She bought me books about my favorite writers for Christmas and did not chide me when I refused to fish with her in favor of scribbling in a spiral notebook during our trips to the lakes of Northern Wisconsin. When, after her diagnosis, she was asked to speak with church groups and at health conferences about living with cancer, she spoke with pride about all of her kids, and she told the crowds that she thought I would be a famous writer someday. Whenever I wrote a new story, poem, or paper for school, she was my first reader. I knew I could count on her for honesty and praise. One of her last gifts to me was a book of biographical sketches called *Women of Words*. I unwrapped it after delivering my big speech at my eighth grade graduation. Inside the book was congratulatory inscription: "To My Beautiful Young Woman of Words."

I was the writer, but Mom was the storyteller. She learned her craft from her mother's side of the family, our Italian relatives in Minnesota and Michigan. Any trip to see those relatives meant two things: good food and good stories. When we gathered, the

collection of aunts, uncles, and cousins crowded family dens or shut down restaurants, spending hours devouring steaming plates of pasta while everyone relived favorite family memories. My mother, whose wild gestures and sunny personality usually enlivened a room, sparkled during these conversations. There was a rhythm to the way her mother's family talked, a way of speaking that I noticed I also adopted when I was with them. There was a shorthand of nudges and "tsks," head-bobs and inflections that marked time in our conversations. As our hands fluttered through the air and our faces grew hot from the plates that filled the table, we would laugh until our bellies ached.

Our visits with the Italian relatives were rare because they lived so far away. Looking back, I realize that Mom must have reveled in those rare visits because they gave her a chance to remember her mother and grandmother, the two women who had most influenced her life. When she was young, my mother traveled often with my great-grandmother, whom everyone in the family called "Grandma G," short for Grandma Giansanti. While my grandparents spent weekends managing family restaurants during Mom's grade school years, Grandma G took Mom on overnight train trips in fancy sleeping cars to see her relatives. When my grandparents could get away for a family vacation, they took Grandma G with them, and she and my mother, an only child, were each other's companions. On all of these trips, my mom would learn about Grandma G's childhood in Capestrano, Italy, and her bold decision to immigrate to the United States as a "picture bride," a story that remains the core of our family canon.

Grandma G, then Marianna Esposito, came to the United States in the early twentieth century. My great-grandfather, Victor Giansanti, lost his first wife when she

fell over her second-story porch along with the tub full of water she was trying to empty. A busy miner, Victor wanted to find a kind woman who could help him raise his two young daughters, so Tony, another miner Victor worked with, suggested that Victor write to his sister, Marianna, at home in the old country. After a few months of letters, Victor invited Marianna to come to meet him in the United States. If she did not like him or his girls, he would pay her passage back home to Capestrano, a small mountain village east of Rome. Marianna sailed to New York, where she passed through Ellis Island. She made her way to Michigan and met Victor, and they were married not long after she arrived. Marianna raised Victor's daughters, Flora and Carrie, as her own, and she later gave birth to three more children: Dominic, Louise, and my grandmother, Antoinette.

I heard my mother tell the story so many times, but I never tired of it. I loved that my family had its own immigrant legend, Ellis Island and all. Whenever I heard their story, I tried to imagine if my great-grandparents had fallen in love at first sight, or if theirs was a love that developed over time, anchored by hope or some feeling that what they were doing was right. I wondered if, in those first years of her marriage, my great-grandmother had missed Capestrano. She had gone back, once or twice, after her children were grown, but she was disappointed when she realized that her friends and family had expected her to bring American money back with her.

Despite the fact that they had seen so much of the U.S. together, my mother never accompanied my great-grandmother on her trips back to Italy. Perhaps Mom thought she would go there with her mother instead, but that dream was never fulfilled. My grandmother, who had survived a bout with breast cancer in the early sixties when my

mom was in second grade, succumbed to ovarian cancer just after Mom started college. Not long after that, my parents were married, and then my brothers and I were born, so the place where her grandmother had grown up and her favorite family traditions had begun remained Mom's own "castle in the air." Mom decided that she and I would visit Italy when I graduated from high school. During our visits with her family in Minnesota and Michigan, Mom would remind me of our plans.

When my mother talked about Italy, she made it sound sacred and special, which made sense because her Catholic faith was grounded in her family's Italian roots. I did not know the word then, but I think that when Mom envisioned our trip to Italy, she imagined it as a pilgrimage, a chance to pay homage to the women who made her who she was.

As I read the manuscript of Amy's letters home from London and Rome, I thought about my own semester abroad, a modern Grand Tour that had surely been inspired by Jo's interest in Europe and my mom's wish to see Italy. During one week of my term break at Lancaster University, I followed my great-grandmother's footsteps back to her village in Italy. I made the journey to Capestrano that my mom had always hoped to take. As my bus from Rome passed through a tunnel and the mountain vista of my great-grandmother's village appeared, I gasped at the beauty of all Grandma G had bravely chosen to leave. How could she have let go of her beloved family and farm for a land as foreign to her as her mountains were to me? In the few years that I had known her, Grandma G. was a tiny, white-haired woman in an apron who kissed me on the nose

and brought suitcases of food on vacation. I never could have imagined her as a brave and brash young farmgirl picture bride until I saw those mountains and understood the difficulty of her choice and the courage it must have taken to make it.

Evidence of my great-grandmother's journey and the many other stories from her side of the family were on the walls and the shelves of my childhood home on West Mark Drive. Family photos lined the hallway wall leading to my bedroom, some of my great-grandmother's cooking tools filled the drawers in our kitchen, and my Grandma Antoinette's good taste was preserved in the boxes of her silver and the fur coats that hung in a basement garment bag. By the spring of 2012, however, the photographs were off the walls and packed away, and the treasures I once knew how to find had been buried in a new location. When I boarded a plane to Massachusetts that May, I told myself I was traveling to Concord to pay homage to its many geniuses, but I realize now that my sudden need to visit Orchard House, another favorite house of my past, sprung from the loss of the house on West Mark Drive. When I returned to Concord just a year after my first visit, I came as a pilgrim, a presenter at the 2013 Orchard House Conversational Series, and a researcher who was eager to learn more about not only Louisa May Alcott but also the reasons for my strange first reactions to Orchard House.

When I had toured Orchard House in 2012, it had not moved me the way I had hoped it would. I had stared at the white half-moon desk at which *Little Women* had been written and willed myself to cry, but I had felt very little. I was too upset by the way my young tour guide had blended the lives of the Alcotts and the Marches together; Louisa

and Jo were similar, but they were not the same woman. Louisa and her family had lived far less stable and domestic lives than my tour of the house suggested. At the end of our tour, my guide shared stories about how other guests had shined flashlights up chimneys and under beds to look for Louisa's spirit. She said that women broke down at the sight of Louisa's desk. I had wanted to be one of those guests, but I was not. Instead, I had been fascinated by The Wayside, the rather dilapidated historic house museum across the street from Orchard House that had once been the Alcotts' Hillside, Louisa's girlhood home.

I learned from the National Parks guide at The Wayside that Hillside was where the memories that Louisa May Alcott fictionalized in *Little Women* had been made. In the parlor, the guide showed me the staircase where the Alcott girls, like the March sisters, played Pilgrim's Progress. The barn where I had purchased my ticket for the tour was where the sisters and their neighborhood friends had performed their juvenile theatricals. The more I toured, the more I realized that The Wayside was a house that had witnessed a great deal of American and literary history. While we toured the kitchen, the guide helped me to imagine the conversations the Alcotts might have had with the escaped slaves they assisted as part of the Underground Railroad. She pointed out the bedroom where the poet Julia Ward Howe once slept and the third floor portico where Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote his last stories at a standing desk. In that highest room of the house, the simmering heat of the day was at its thickest. I watched dust mites sparkle and settle on the furnishings in the glaring light of the sun. There was a ramshackle, slapdash quality to the way The Wayside was arranged, and something in me really liked that. The Wayside had

been the Alcotts' home for just three years, but I felt closer to Louisa there than I had at Orchard House, the museum that, in terms of promotion and popularity, was more strongly linked to Alcott's legacy. As I walked the Lexington Road back to the center of town, I wished for more time in Concord, more time to understand how my pilgrimage had gone awry. My train back to Boston departed the Concord station, and with it went any hopes I had of understanding my strange reaction to a home I had dreamed so long to see.

Almost a year later, I was still so troubled by my experience at Orchard House and The Wayside that I asked Nicola Watson about it as part of an e-mail interview. I knew Watson was preparing a book on literary tourism in America, so I asked her for her thoughts on the two Alcott houses:

> […] there is considerable tension between the [two] Alcott houses, both institutional and aesthetic. Put simply, one house is premised on one model of literary tourism – viz. the very place where the writer lived, worked, and imagined the book; the other functions on a very different premise – the place where the book is set. But the situation is complicated by the fact that both have claims to having been the place of inspiration. Thus a struggle has been produced between the two houses for relative authenticity, a struggle much exacerbated by the fact that this is 'children's literature' – the appeal to children is always the fictive rather than the biographical, and real place rather than the writer's desk. (Date of interview)

As a devotee of Jo March and Louisa May Alcott, I was in the middle of the struggle Watson described. I think the Alcott fan was disappointed by the way Orchard House blended the facts of the author Alcott's life with the fiction of *Little Women*. I could not appreciate the house as a "workshop of genius" (*Literary Tourist* 90) because the guide was constantly encouraging me to think of it as the home of fictional characters instead of a flesh-and-blood writer, and there was more evidence of May Alcott's artistry—her paintings, her pen and ink cartoons on the walls—around the house than there were manuscripts or memorials to writing. At the same time, the girl who wanted to be Jo March's friend thrilled at the notion that maybe she existed in some unexplored nook or cranny of The Wayside, but the scholar understood that Louisa's—not Jo's—childhood took place in that decrepit, ramshackle house.

When I returned to Concord in July 2013, just days before visiting the library, I hoped to tour both houses again, but those hopes were dashed when, as I walked the Lexington Road to Orchard House for the first day of the conference, I noticed that The Wayside was closed for renovations. And to further complicate matters, the staff at Orchard House was so welcoming that I felt guilty for liking their museum less. In the small circle of women that gathered each day for the Conversational Series, I saw the sewing circle of Laurence University, the college into which Jo and Professor Bhaer's Plumfield Academy transforms, in the flesh. In *A Hunger for Home*, Sarah Elbert argues that "if men return to the natural world to gain liberty, women create civilization to gain their freedom," and thus Alcott liberated herself by creating the egalitarian community of Jo March Bhaer's Plumfield Academy and Laurence University (219). Now, here

Orchard House was, perpetuating that community and its spirit of women's equality, striving to create a place where the work of one of my favorite women writers was being given as much attention and scrutiny as that of her male counterparts, and I was still hung up on its rival museum! What was my problem?

The answer hit me not long after I returned my "treasure" to the special collections librarian and walked back to my hotel. On this Tuesday, I had delivered my presentation at the Alcott conference and held a piece of Louisa May Alcott's writing in my hands; it only seemed fitting to end the day at Alcott's grave on Author's Ridge in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. The humid evening air clung to my skin as I climbed the gentle hill to Author's Ridge. The setting sun cast a golden glow over the Alcott plot—one tall monument, five short, round headstones, and Louisa's inlaid marker, a simple rectangle of stone. A medallion connoting Alcott's service in the nursing corps was pressed into the ground just above the stone. Other visitors had scattered pennies and pine stones around the plot to commemorate their visits. In front of Louisa May Alcott's grave, I placed the rose that the Orchard House staff had used to wrap my presenter's gift. It was a small way to thank the woman whose writing and life had inspired so much of my best work.

As I sat on a bench that faced the Alcott plot, it occurred to me that I had never gone on my own to put flowers at my mother's grave. In fact, after she died, I stopped going to cemeteries. At first, I had been mad that my mother would be buried an hour away from where we lived. There was a cemetery across the road from my high school in Sheboygan, and I had wanted her to be there, so that I could take my lunch out to her plot or stop by on my way home from school. Once she was buried, however, I was glad the

plot was in Appleton. It became very clear to me that my mother did not reside in St. Mary's Cemetery. Rather, she was alive in our house, in the objects she used to use, in the music we played on the stereo, in the smells that had still wafted from her dresser drawers or the linen closet. But now that the house was gone, and I was transferring my love and desire for that house—for its rooms of mismatched furniture, for its shelves cluttered with family lore, for the memory of my mother it carried—onto The Wayside. I was longing for home and for my childhood, a time when my mother was alive, and The Wayside was physical evidence that Louisa May Alcott had something to long for, too.

Several critics would suggest that the nostalgia I felt for my childhood home and the way I connected my mother to her belongings may have been directly related not only to the *Little House* books but also to *Little Women*. In "A Power in the House: *Little Women* and the Architecture of Individual Expression," David H. Watters argues that "the style of the house in *Little Women* spoke to readers as expressively as did the literary style of Alcott's prose" (185). In his essay, Watters demonstrates how the architecture of the March home and characters' interaction with it represent the domestic ideology of the post-war period as well as the potential for change. He explains how those who had lost loved ones in the Civil war "found comfort in nostalgic fantasies of a heavenly home" because the image of a home with the family at the hearth gave them courage to face whatever came next. "If one's family lacked such a home, or if it had been lost due to the Civil war, migration, or industrialization, the March home could domesticate this nostalgia for readers" (191). He suggests that Alcott evokes the nostalgic iconography of

the Civil War era by filling tableau-style scenes with objects that had appeared in popular war-era art depicting families on the home front awaiting a soldier's return:

> The subtext [of such scenes] is the question of what sort of home the men will find after the war and what sort of men women will find, among those who do come back. Implicit in the idea of return is the knowledge that one can never go back home again, but Americans needed reassurance that such a place existed and was worth fighting for. For Alcott's readers, the book reaffirmed a nostalgic view of an antebellum ideal […] (193)

Though by the time *Little Women* was published, there was no longer anything to fight for, there was a country in need of repair that needed something to live for. By recalling scenes from the happy homes of its past, Alcott's nostalgic imagery buoyed a nation.

While Watters examines the impact of whole rooms and scenes in his essay, Nina Auerbach, in "Waiting Together: Alcott on Matriarchy," analyzes the impact of individual things in *Little Women*:

> Alcott trusts what she can see, and nowhere is her reliance on the life in things more vividly apparent than in her delineation of the March haven: the expressive rattle of Jo's knitting needles, the high-heeled boots which crush Meg's feet; Beth's divine piano, Amy's plaster casts and the delicate 'things' she dramatically sweeps off the bazaar table; Marmee's crooned-over slippers. Throughout the novel the March women are defined in their primary relationship to the "things" that display their characters. (13)

Just as Alcott defined her characters by their objects, I had identified my mother by her things, and in our house, I had been able to look at those things and conjure memories of good times spent together. *Little Women* had taught me that I could do that because that was exactly what Jo had done.

Shortly after Jo returns from New York, her sister Beth dies. As Jo copes with her grief and her discomfort in the role of caregiver to her parents, Marmee suggests that she take up writing again, to write something for her family "and never mind the rest of the world" (339). When her first attempt succeeds and garners requests for more material, Jo, "taught by love and sorrow," writes more stories grounded in her family's simple values and experiences, and she profits (340). Nevertheless, the changes in her family life—Beth's death, Meg's new twin babies, Amy's engagement abroad to Laurie—leave her feeling restless with a "sorrowfully patient wonder" about whether she will come to know the familial joys her sisters are experiencing. She climbs to her attic garret and stands in front of "four little wooden chests in a row, each marked with its owner's name, and each filled with relics of the childhood and girlhood ended now for all" (342). She sifts through the memorabilia in her own box and kneels beside it to cry before writing "In the Garret," a sentimental poem for her sisters that serves as her siren song to Professor Bhaer. He reads the poem in a newspaper and travels to meet Jo at her doorstep. "Was it all self-pity, loneliness, or low spirits? or was it the waking up of a sentiment which had bided its time as patiently as its inspirer?" the narrator asks about the source of the Jo's inspiration. "Who shall say" (342). Writing about the childhood objects she cherished brings Jo more joy than she imagined. Jo, like her sisters, starts a family of her own, and

she, as is evidenced by *Little Men* and *Jo's Boys*, *Little Women's* sequels, enjoys the illustrious writing career she once dreamed about.

I looked at Alcott's grave, and I thought about the boxes of memorabilia Mom had collected for me and my three brothers. The place where we had made the memories kept in those boxes had been out of the family for two years, transformed into someplace that, when I drove past it on a recent afternoon, still looked like my house but did not feel like my house. Its startling unfamiliarity frightened me away, out of my old neighborhood and back onto the highway. Now, my memorabilia box was tucked away in an unfamiliar corner of my dad's new house, so how was I supposed to emulate Jo March? How was I supposed to tell my mother's stories? How was I supposed to remember my own? As the sun set below the rolling hills of the cemetery, I was grateful for having resolved my feelings for Orchard House, but I still felt a little hollow inside.

Two days later, I was taking my second tour of Orchard House with a fellow presenter, Diane, as my guide. Following her expert lead, I received a "behind the scenes" tour of Orchard House. We stepped behind guard ropes and through back passageways the way Jo, demonstrating her power and resistance to her society's rules, climbs through windows and sneaks into libraries in *Little Women*[28]. Diane told me stories about the house's restoration and pointed out famous signatures in the museum's first guestbook. She understood that I didn't just want the textbook version of Louisa May Alcott's life that the college-age seasonal tour guides delivered; I wanted to learn the house's secrets the way I learned my family's secrets: through storytelling. At points

throughout our tour we had to pause and wait for the regular guided tour to move to its next spot in the house. During one pause, Diane mentioned something about how May Alcott, Louisa's youngest sister, had been thirty-eight when she had married and started a family.

"And of course," Diane continued, "—and I'll only say this to you because you're here at this conference and seem to understand this sort of thing—we fans of Louisa May Alcott and *Little Women* tend to measure our lives by Louisa's or Jo's or any March sister's. When I turned thirty I thought, 'this is the age Louisa was when she went to war,' and as I get closer to forty, I realize I'm passing the age May was when she got married and had a baby. You start to get nervous, you know?"

I knew exactly what she meant. In fact, my trips to Orchard House, and maybe all of the trips I had taken, had been in some way motivated by that urge to be more like Louisa May Alcott and her literary sisters. I, like Diane, took comfort in Jo's relatively late marriage, Louisa's happy spinsterhood, Maud Montgomery's late pregnancies, Laura Ingalls Wilder's sexagenarian literary success, and Beatrix Potter's triumphant "third act." I read about Jo's anxiety over turning twenty-five in *Little Women*[29] and recognized the niggling nervousness about turning thirty I was still trying to ignore. When she said them, Diane's words were a comfort; I was not the only one living by a literary calendar. But as I packed for my morning flight, my immediate recognition of Diane's sentiment started to haunt me.

Orchard House was opened to the public as a museum in 1912, but visitors eager to catch a glimpse of "Jo March" at work visited Concord when the Alcott family was

still in residence. “People begin to come and stare at the Alcotts,” Louisa wrote in 1869, a year after *Little Women*’s publication. “Reporters haunt the place to look at the authoress, who dodges into the woods á la Hawthorne, and won’t be even a very small lion” (*Journals* 171). In preparing for my presentation, I had read Alcott’s complaints about literary “lion-hunters” as well as her satirical recreations of encounters with fans. Remembering those passages now made me feel sheepish and intrusive.

A scene from *Jo’s Boys* is truly embarrassing. In it, Alcott uses her alter ego, Jo, to satirize an actual conversation she had had with a woman from, of all places, Oshkosh, the city that was home to my graduate school. “‘Girls, this is the spot where she wrote those sweet, those moral tales which have thrilled us to the soul!’” cries Mrs. Erastus Kingsbury Parmalee as she stands in Jo Bhaer’s parlor (47). At first, Jo pretends to be a housemaid, but when one of Mrs. Parmalee’s girls recognizes her, she gives herself up and allows the Parmalees to pay her homage:

> “If ever you come to Oshkosh, your feet won’t be allowed to touch the pavement; for you’ll be borne in the arms of the populace, we shall be so dreadful glad to see you.”
>
> Mentally resolving never to visit that effusive town, Jo responded as cordially as she could; and having written her name in the albums, provided each visitor with a memento, and kissed them all round, they at last departed, to call on “Longfeller, Holmes, and the rest”—who were all out, it is devoutly to be hoped. (48)

Would Alcott be bothered from beyond the grave by my visit? Would my literary hero have hated the fact that I toured her house?

The new questions that emerged at Orchard House led me to think about one of the last trips I took with my mom. In the summer before I started high school, she and I drove to Hibbing, Minnesota, and Iron Mountain, Upper Michigan, to visit with family before attending a memorial service for Carrie, her mother's half-sister, one of the two daughters that my great-grandfather's first wife had left behind. On our way to Hibbing, we picked up more of Carrie's nieces—my mom's cousin Bernie, who was old enough to be my mother's aunt, and Bernie's sister, Dee. The three of us would stay for a few days with Louise, Carrie and my grandmother's sister, before circling back to Iron Mountain for the service.

I knew very little about "Auntie Carrie," as Bernie, Dee, and my mother called her. She had been in a coma in a nursing home since before I could remember, and Mom had never gone to visit her. Her death, it seemed, was a welcome event, an end to what I later learned had been almost thirty years on life support after suffering from a stroke. In remembering this trip, I also recalled that, coincidentally, Carrie had been one of four sisters, the second eldest, and more like Jo March and Louisa May Alcott than I could have anticipated.

When I called her this year to learn about Carrie, Auntie Louise was full of stories about her older sister, the family rebel. "I remember, one time I went to visit her in Chicago, and when I got to her house, an entirely different family was living there. The

neighborhood was so run down, you know, so I felt lucky that the woman who opened the door was very kind and welcoming. She knew where she had gone, and so I found her. But if that woman wouldn't have been home, we never would have known where she'd moved to."

Auntie Louise told me stories about how Carrie lied to skip school, how she was pregnant before she married and was one of the few women in her community to get a divorce. It seemed to me that she had lived a difficult life, but she had also lived on her own terms. I could hear the smile in my great-aunt's voice as she told me over the phone about how kind the rough-edged Carrie had been to her, the sister who—since my grandmother had been the pampered, artistically inclined baby sister like Amy March—was most surely the "Beth" to Carrie's "Jo."

As we drove to Iron Mountain, I sat next to the box that held Carrie's ashes, which had been shipped to Louise for safe-keeping. Bernie, Dee, Louise, my mother, my great-uncle Dominic, and I were tasked with burying Carrie's urn in the family plot. As I stared at the cardboard postal box that sat beside me, I realized that I pitied Carrie; her decades-long coma had made her a family curiosity. At the time, no one told stories about her colorful life; they just shook their heads in sympathy at her vegetative state. Medical technology had allowed family and friends to hang on to the hope that the old Carrie would return while the Carrie of the present withered away in silence.

I began to wonder if, in satirizing her "lion-hunters" and chastising her fans, Louisa May Alcott was trying to end the life of her readers' relationship with the

Marches so that none of their energies withered. At the end of *Jo's Boys*, Alcott's narrator admits that "It is a strong temptation to the weary historian to close the present tale with an earthquake which should engulf Plumfield and its environs so deeply in the bowels of the earth that no youthful Schliemann[5] could ever find a vestige of it" (321). When I read that line while preparing for my presentation, it puzzled me. What a destructive thing to wish upon a peaceful, model family! But perhaps Alcott understood that it would take an earthquake to shake her readers out of the nostalgic spell that her books had so skillfully cast. *Little Women* owed some of its early success to the fact that it provided Reconstruction-era readers with a quaint, comfortable portrait of their not-so-distant past. In the pages of *Little Women* was the idealized home front that inspired many a patriotic pledge. The Marches were the family every post-war American wanted: loving, intact, reminiscent of values that seemed lost.

Alcott, however, understood the dangers of idealism. Though the daughter of a respected Transcendental thinker, she tended to adopt her mother's more practical philosophy. Her father's faith in the possibility of an ideal society had led him to create Fruitlands, the Utopian community that nearly starved his children and separated him from his wife. From those dark times, Alcott learned to work first and philosophize later. She begrudged the visitors whose chatter kept her from pursuing her writing, her means of survival. As I packed my suitcase, I thought again about Diane's comparisons and Carrie's burial and Alcott's own destructive desires. Now I could picture Louisa in the maid's costume she sometimes donned to chase her unwelcome visitors away. I saw her

[5]An early German pioneer of archaeology

shooing me from the porch of Orchard House with a broom, shouting "Go away! Go live your own life! Let me go!" Perhaps it was time for me to stop taking pilgrimages to writers' houses and start becoming a writer worthy of pilgrimage myself.

Victor Turner says that "pilgrimage, ideally, is charismatic, in the sense that [a] pilgrim's decision to make it is a response to a charism, a grace, while at the same time he receives grace as he makes his devotions" (31). In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian is prompted by the grace of a dream to pursue the Celestial City. His reward for his pilgrimage—for the devotion of enduring the Slough of Despond or The Hill of Difficulty—is Heaven, quite literally God's grace. In *Little Women*, Jo makes her devotions by learning to put her sisters before herself, deciding to write from her heart rather than for money, and welcoming the new members of her family rather than scorning them as threats to the sisterly bond she cherished or symbols of an adulthood she is reluctant to claim. The grace she receives is the chance to "place the name of March upon the roll of fame" (*Little Women* 191). She writes successful stories and has a family she never planned on but delights in just the same.

In response to the graces that four writers' brilliant works bestowed on my childhood, I made pilgrimages to the writers' former homes and the places that honor them. Making my devotions involved befriending other travelers, enduring airport delays, taking risks in unfamiliar places, and, above all, revisiting my past. The grace I have received from this pilgrimage is the chance to write it all down, and, in doing so, be healed.

Roberta Rubenstein suggests that some characters in contemporary novels use nostalgia to "transmute loss and achieve a new level of awareness" (6). Before I set off on my pilgrimage, I worried that the loss of my childhood home meant losing my mother and my childhood forever. After re-reading the favorite books of my girlhood and visiting the places that inspired them, however, I realize that the writers I have admired all my life did exactly what I need to do: so as not to lose the childhoods, the places, the people they cherished, they wrote about them, and in doing so, they were able to move beyond loss, repression, loneliness, and poverty. In writing about my pilgrimage, I think I have begun to move beyond my grief.

"'It is a play we are playing all the time in one way or another. Our burdens are here, our road is before us, and the longing for goodness and happiness is the guide that leads us through many troubles and mistakes to the peace which is a true Celestial City,'" Marmee reminds her daughters as she challenges them to make pilgrimages of their lives. For the last fourteen years, I have allowed grief to be my burden, and I bore it proudly, foolishly believing that hanging onto it made me stronger, more respectful, more mature, a better daughter. I have clung to that grief the way Jo clings to her pride, Meg and Amy their vanity, and Beth her fear. But my pilgrimages to Pepin, Hill Top, Prince Edward Island, and Concord have helped me to see that, in clinging to my grief, I am missing out on joy, which is something my mother never would have wanted for me. My mother lost her mom when she was in her twenties, but she managed to be one of the most joyful people I knew. While I understand now that I cannot and should not try to live my life for my mother, I think her joyfulness is one trait I ought to replicate.

Before she died, Mom wrote two important books, two *Mother Remembers* journals. She completed one book for me, and almost finished a book for my brother Kristopher. I knew where she kept the journals, so I put them in my nightstand and promised to copy Kris's journal into the books she had purchased for Erik and Jeremy and give them as gifts to each brother when he graduated from college. In copying Kris's journal and rereading the journal she wrote for me, I learned about who my mom had been before she married and what she struggled with as a young woman. In one entry, she confessed that one of the most difficult things to adjust to as a newlywed was "being more of a free person, not allowing myself to become a mere puppet or rubber stamp of my spouse or my mother." In answer to a question about something she wished she had done differently as an adult, she said that "I wish I had started being 'me' earlier. I always wanted so badly to be the best wife and mother that I often lost sight of 'me.'" She bemoaned being a 'goody two-shoes' growing up and wished she had had the self-confidence to take more chances.

Those entries, which I first read years ago, have kept coming back to me as I work on this project. Her journals are as inspiring as the Alcott manuscript I held in the Concord library; Mom lives on in her words, and she will continue to live on in mine.

As hard as I may have tried to be in the years following her death, I cannot and should not be a copy of my mother. As much as I worry about what the future holds, I cannot let that fear hold me back. The journey this project has led me on has, in some ways, felt like a cosmic kick in the pants from my mom. Like Abba Alcott for her Louisa, my mom was the greatest champion of my writing. When this project is completed, I will

have written a book. *"See?"* I can hear her say. *"I knew you could do it. Now go out and write another one!"* Like *Little Women*, however, this book has been based on my past. What kind of book will I write about my future?

In truth, I do not have an answer yet, but I do have a hint.

"'Hope and keep busy'" (*Little Women* 135) was a favorite motto of Abba Alcott, one that her daughter then adopted for Marmee March. When I opened my presenter's gift after my speech at Orchard House, it was the slogan emblazoned on my souvenir key chain. It is the mantra I am trying to live right now. I cannot yearn for change, as I have in the past, while doing nothing to change my future; I have to keep busy working for it, and more importantly, I have to be willing to accept the change. I have to be willing to take risks and perhaps even separate myself from the people and places that have comforted me, and, most importantly, I have to believe that such change will come. After years of following in the footsteps of the most inspiring real and fictional women I know, I want to, as Jo tells Marmee, "'hop a little way and try my wings'" (259). I finally feel ready to try.

EPILOGUE

The call arrives in the middle of my third hour IB English class. The phone only rings during class time for wrong numbers or emergencies, but since I can't ignore the latter, I ask my students, a bright and bubbly group of juniors pursuing their International Baccalaureate certificates, to pause for a moment while I take the call.

"Hello, is Stefanie Jochman there?" the woman on the phone sounds confident and a bit older. I wonder if she's a parent calling about the yearbook. They always call about the yearbook.

"This is she, but I'm in a class right now. Can I call you back?"

"Oh! Oh my, I didn't realize I had your personal phone number. Let me just say very quickly, so you can get back to class, that this is Dr. Peggy O'Brien…"

The name stops me cold. Last month, I sent an application to Dr. O'Brien for a program under her direction at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. Four weeks. Twenty-five teachers from around the nation. Access to the Folger's rare collections. New people. New challenges. Almost a whole summer in someplace new. When I thought about the program, I felt the same giddiness I had experienced when I tasted that first tea on the flight to Manchester or flew into PEI. Today is the day they announce the participants. I had listed my classroom number on the application. Is this why Dr. O'Brien is calling?

I can feel my pulse quicken. I look at my students. They stare back at me, curious to know why I, who frequently shake my fist at the clock when the end-of-class bell interrupts a great discussion, am listening so intently, without a hint of annoyance.

I nod as I hear Dr. O'Brien say, with equal parts authority and kindness, "You should hang up now and tell your students that you have some very good news…"

I have spent the last few summers looking back, making a pilgrimage through my past. This summer, I will start to move forward.

NOTES

Introduction

[1] West's chapter, "Gender Politics and the Orchard House Museum," is a fascinating study of how the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Concord Women's Club, and author Harriet Lothrop, in the decisions they made while fundraising for the house's preservation and making plans for its presentation to the public, shaped the legacy of Orchard House and Louisa May Alcott. West argues that the history of Orchard House's preservation reflects just how complex and ambiguous *Little Women* is. She suggests that "*Little Women*, through its singular characterization of Jo's internal struggles, could be read to express the janus-faced predicament of the early-twentieth-century woman, poised between the 'cult of domesticity' and the era of 'the new woman'" (72). West explains how that "janus-faced predicament" was lived out in Concord women's arguments over whether Orchard House would be a model of nineteenth-century domesticity, as many women wary of Concord's rapidly growing and diversifying population were eager to make it, or a celebration of an early pioneer in women's rights, since Alcott and her mother were some of the first women in Concord to vote when they cast legal ballots in a school board election. In the end, nostalgia won, and Orchard House became a temple to the comfortable hearth and traditional family structure portrayed on the surface of *Little Women*.

The tension between the cult of domesticity and the rising "new woman" surrounds not only Louisa May Alcott and *Little Women* but also the life and work of L.M. Montgomery, Beatrix Potter, and Laura Ingalls Wilder. Furthermore, it is a tension I have felt keenly as I try to determine what "being a woman" means for me. I was raised by a stay-at-home mother, and my reading habits were shaped by novels that were heavily influenced by the cult of domesticity. I wonder now if some of the anxieties I record in this thesis about growing older or finding romantic relationships have been influenced by my early reading habits and my upbringing. Would I be so concerned about my romantic future had I fallen in love with more contemporary writers as a young girl?

Many scholars have addressed whether the works of Alcott, Montgomery, and Wilder set progressive or regressive examples for their women readers. The fact that all of the women discussed in this study are memorialized in domestic spaces also adds layers to the complicated questions of gender surrounding their books. Unfortunately, the limits of this thesis do not allow for me to explore those questions in these pages, though I am certainly aware of and interested in them.

[2]The members of the March family are based on Alcott's own parents and sisters, most notably Beth March, who is representative of Elizabeth (Lizzie) Alcott, a sister who died ten years before Alcott wrote *Little Women*.

[3] In preparing to write my thesis, I asked friends and relatives to share their reflections on the work of Wilder, Potter, Montgomery, and Alcott. I received a number of moving testimonials that I had hoped to share in other parts of the thesis but found

difficult to incorporate into my final product. Below are a few quotes that demonstrate the restorative power of these tales:

> Even at the age of ten or eleven, I was sometimes afraid of the dark, particularly after I'd watched a scary movie or read a scary book. I then, and still do, have an overactive imagination. There was no question of me falling asleep, so instead I would grab one of my three comfort books: *Little Women, Little House on the Prairie,* or *Anne of Green Gables*. My dad would get up at 3:00 am for a drink of water and see my light, tiptoe into my bedroom and shut it off, my hands still embracing the open book that had lulled me to sleep. (Chelsea, age 27)

> In a lot of ways, Anne is still my role model. She gave me hope that even as a weird little kid with a big imagination who tended toward the melodramatic, I could still be loved and accepted. She taught me to dream big, and to appreciate the "scope for imagination" in new places and experiences. If I have daughters, I will share Anne with them. (Abby, age 28)

> When I was about 8, my parents took me to visit the Laura Ingalls Wilder house in Wisconsin. It was my first time visiting a place I had read about in a book. I remember everything kind of slowing down and every detail enhancing itself before my eyes. I took in everything—the sights, the sounds, even the gift shop with an edition of one of the books written in

Japanese. There were tour guides dressed in period clothing and relics from Laura's life…it was just as neat as any museum I had been to, but yet more familiar. I was able to recall objects and places in the house from Laura's stories. I could envision her living in this space. It really brought the books to life even more. (Gina, age 27)

I read the Little House books in second grade at St. Pius. […] I got hooked on the books because Laura was a little girl growing up originally in the woods of Wisconsin and I could relate to her. She had such spirit to do anything she wanted to do! I loved her relationship with her family and the way her father did anything to support and feed his family. The family was not wealthy (similar to us) but they wanted the best for their children and provided lots of love.

[…]

I enjoyed the books so much that I bought the entire set of paperback books to read to my three sons when they were little. (Kathy, age 53)

Jo was probably one of my literary role models--is still, in fact. Laura Ingalls, Jo March, Scarlett O'Hara, Anne Shirley, Dorothy Gale, Alice--they were all independent, didn't need a man, educated (well, as educated as they could be in their respective eras and given their ages), and able to function within society while still creating their own rules. Many of these

> characters ended up with men, of course, but Anne, Laura, and Jo ended up with men who were their intellectual equal--men who loved these women's spirit, smarts, and "can-do" attitudes, and allowed Anne and Jo to have careers and follow their passions. It's all pretty progressive, in many ways. (Morgan, age 33)

[4] Ann Romines records how Wilder told her daughter Rose Wilder Lane in 1937 that "'I can't work on my book in the evening, because if I do, I can't sleep. My brain goes right on remembering and it's H---'" (143). Louisa May Alcott suffered ill health for most of her career as a writer. After completing *Little Women*, she wrote "Very tired, head full of pain from overwork, and heart heavy about Marmee, who is growing feeble" (*Journals* 166). She also complained about the demands readers put on her semi-autobiographical tales: "Girls write to ask who the little women marry, as if that was the only end and aim of a woman's life. I *won't* marry Jo to Laurie to please anyone" (167). Montgomery delighted in Anne and other heroines upon their creation, but, as Mary Henley Rubio writes, "it was only her personal discipline that got her through the sequels, where her feisty heroines had to be tamed" (317). Rubio notes how Maud was frustrated by the restrictions of convention. She hoped to capture more of her own experience by imbuing her young characters with "'very vivid love affairs'" but knew that the market (and society) would not allow it (318). In addition, trying to write about Anne's happy life in the midst of her very complicated middle age was difficult for Montgomery.

[5] Westover, as is suggested by his title, remains focused on the grave tourism that was popular in the Romantic period while Watson offers a definitive overview of grave,

birthplace, "homes and haunts," and "imagined landscapes" tourism popularized in the Victorian period with roots in Romanticism.

[6] Watson shares the disillusioned reactions of one traveler as published in Jesse J Heneage's *Literary and Historical Monuments of London* (1847):

> "That Poets' Corner should have been selected to hold the memorials of these celebrated men, is in a great degree to be regretted, inasmuch as we are apt to misplace our sentiment by imagining that we are standing on the dust of departed genius, whereas we are only gazing on their cenotaphs." (*Literary Tourist* 29)

[7] As Julian North explains in "Literary Biography and the House of the Poet," "literary tourism began to develop as a popular pursuit of the middle classes in Britain at the same time as literary biography […] emerged as one of the success stories of publishing. In many ways, biography encouraged and sustained the practice of literary tourism" (49). In her exploration of the work of William Howitt, author of *Homes and Haunts of the Most Eminent British Poets*, and other biographers of the mid-nineteenth century, North suggests that a trope of the literary biography of the period, an "imaginary tour" of a writer's house or other site associated with his or her work inspired pilgrimages to writers' homes because "reading a *Life* had long been represented as analogous to the activity of visiting a home and, in some respects, biographical representation of the poet's house extended quite naturally to its eventual construction as a commercial site of tourism" (50). These home tours, North argues, "did away with a public rhetoric of eulogy and produced, instead, authentic understanding. In entering the home of the great

man, the reader of biography would gain an informal and thus a true insight, as the public façade dissolved" (50).

[8] For those interested in the history of The Wayside, a former home of the Alcotts that I discuss in the last chapter of this thesis, Hazard's essay is a must-read. The Wayside is called "The Home of the Authors," because the Alcotts, Hawthornes, and Harriet Lothrop (author of *The Five Little Peppers*) all inhabited the house at one point in their lives. Hazard explains how Nathaniel Hawthorne visited Abbotsford and was horrified by the hordes of fans who passed through Scott's home, throngs that Abbotsford's architecture courted and welcomed. Anticipating similar interest in his homes after his death, the very private Hawthorne purposely remodeled The Wayside to make it less inviting to future visitors.

[9] The American writer Washington Irving was one of the many literary tourists who visited Abbotsford and other literary destinations in England. He recorded his adventures in *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, a collection of essays that were largely responsible for America's "inheritance" of literary tourism. As Paul Westover explains in his essay, "How America 'Inherited' Literary Tourism," Irving imagined himself as an American Sir Walter Scott. Like Scott, who sometimes wrote as the mysterious "Author of Waverley," Irving attributed some of the tales in the *Sketch-Book* to alter-egos. He, like Scott, "establish[ed] classic ground in his native country, weaving literary associations into the landscape and even preparing it for export" ("How America Inherited" 191). Irving fashioned his own home, Sunnyside, after Scott's Abbotsford House. He used building materials taken from the locations of his stories, and

he even "imported ivy clippings from Melrose [Abbey, of Abbotsford] to plant on Sunnyside's walls" (192). Shortly after Irving died in 1859, the people of Tarrytown, New York, renamed the cemetery where Irving was buried; they called it "Sleepy Hollow" in honor of one of Irving's most beloved stories. Just four years before Tarrytown renamed Sleepy Hollow, the people of Concord, Massachusetts, had come together to consecrate their own Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, a place where the Alcotts, Hawthornes, Thoreaus, and Emersons would eventually be laid to rest on the now-famous "Authors' Ridge." "It seems fitting that so many literary dead should be buried in Sleepy Hollow(s)," suggests Westover, since the proliferation of the name as a resting place for America's literati makes Sleepy Hollow an American "Poets' Corner" of sorts.

[10] Green Gables Heritage Place has since been reconstructed. When a fire destroyed much of the farmhouse in 1997, it was deemed a national tragedy. Fans of Anne were so eager to see Green Gables live again that funds for the reconstruction were raised in a matter of months (MacLeod 134).

[11] For example, Charles "Pa" Ingalls's fiddle is the prized possession of Rocky Ridge Farm, Laura's final home in Mansfield, Missouri, but Pa never visited nor took up his bow there.

Chapter I: PEPIN, WI

[12] In *Little House on the Prairie*, Pa announces that the family will move to Kansas. He fears that the "big woods" are getting too small, too quickly. That book follows the Ingallses on the perilous pilgrimage to Kansas, where they eventually settle in what turns out to be Osage Indian territory. By the end of *Little House on the Prairie*,

Laura and her family are back in their covered wagon and looking for a new home on new, unoccupied land.

On the Banks of Plum Creek, the third book in the series, finds the family living in a sod house in Minnesota while Pa builds a new house out of wood that he buys on credit, sure that the wheat crop he plans to grow the following summer will pay for the boards. Unfortunately, the family's first summer in Minnesota is plagued by a hoard of grasshoppers that descends on the wheat crop and lays eggs that promise further infestation the following year. Though a strong winter storm kills off the grasshopper eggs that threaten the next summer's wheat (and nearly strands Pa from the family on Christmas), it's still difficult for the Ingallses to make ends meet. By the beginning of *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, Laura's Aunt Docia's invitation for Pa and the family to join her in tending to the railroad workers in South Dakota seems like an opportunity Charles Ingalls can't ignore. Pa convinces Ma that another journey West will bring more land and a better farm than the one they've built in Minnesota. Laura, now twelve and taking greater responsibility for the family since scarlet fever has blinded her older sister, is fascinated by the railroad and the rough men who come to build it. While living at the railroad camp, she rides wild ponies with her step-cousin, Lena, and then yearns to live as freely as those ponies when she realizes that her family will be settling for good in the quickly growing town of De Smet. The last three books of the original series, *The Long Winter*, *Little Town on the Prairie*, and *These Happy Golden Years* also take place in De Smet. In *The Long Winter*, Laura and her family endure seven months of cold and snow as the town's food supply dwindles. The town is saved by Cap Garland, a local boy, and

Almanzo Wilder, a character familiar to readers of Wilder's second book, *Farmer Boy,* a tale of her husband's boyhood in rural New York. Almanzo and Cap brave a blizzard to bring wheat back to De Smet from a neighboring settlement. In *Little Town on the Prairie* and *These Happy Golden Years*, De Smet grows as a community, and Laura teaches in several area schools while being courted by Almanzo.

[13] *The First Four Years*, a novel about Laura and Almanzo's early married life which is now packaged as part of the *Little House* series, was actually published after Wilder's death from a manuscript found by Wilder's daughter Rose Wilder Lane's heir.

[14] In one chapter of *The Wilder Life*, Wendy McClure relates her experience of spending the night in a covered wagon that's available to rent (and is frequently booked!).

Chapter III: Prince Edward Island

[15] When Anne arrives at Green Gables, she asks Marilla if she can be called "Cordelia," a persona that, as Gabriella Ahmansson asserts, "seems to be modeled largely on Scott's heroine Ellen Douglas from 'The Lady of the Lake'" (377). Scott's *The Lady of the Lake* is set in the Trossachs on Scotland's Loch Katrine, and Scott began writing the poem in 1809 while on holiday in the area. The poem tells the story of a hunter, "Fitz-James," who gets lost near Loch Katrine and is saved by the beautiful Ellen. Ellen takes Fitz-James to her family's "romantic rustic retreat," where he flirts with her before reluctantly going back to join his hunting party (Watson 156). Throughout the poem, Scott provides readers with guidebook-like descriptions of the Trossachs' most beautiful vistas. Watson argues that the poem "models the tourist's relation to the landscape—

attraction, flirtation, followed by a wistfully regretful romantic distance; as such, it is a real holiday romance" (157). Montgomery, like Scott, devotes lengthy passages to descriptions of scenic landscapes on Prince Edward Island.

[16] In a journal entry written on August 1, 1909, after walking in Lover's Lane, Montgomery wrote "I owe much to that lane, and in turn, I have given it love—and fame. I have painted it in my book; and as a result the name of this little remote woodland lane is known all over the world. Visitors to Cavendish ask for it and seek it out" (*CJ 1901-1911* 236).

[17] As Rubio notes in her biography of Montgomery, the author and Smith's careers seemed to follow a similar trajectory. Smith, a minister and naval officer, was giving illustrated speeches about Prince Edward Island around the United States in 1907, the same year Montgomery was completing the manuscript for *Anne of Green Gables.* Montgomery was well aware of Smith's efforts to promote the island, as is shown in a scrapbook page that places his photograph near a maple leaf of patriotism and a poem by Clinton Scollard about "Lover's Lane." In 1919, Smith visited Montgomery and her husband Ewan at their manse in Leaskdale, Ontario. Smith's subsequent visits to the manse raised many eyebrows, and, eventually town gossip may have been what led Montgomery to cut off communication with Smith and his wife when they moved near Ottawa in 1923. At some point during their friendship, Montgomery gave Smith the typewriter on which she had composed *Anne of Green Gables* (Rubio 259-272).

[18]Marilla Cuthbert acknowledges the "Land of Evangeline" fad in "Anne's History," an early chapter of *Anne of Green Gables*. When Anne asks her about the

White Sands hotel, Marilla explains that it's a place where "'heaps of Americans come […] for the summer. They think this shore is just about right'" (*Green Gables* 90). Marilla's words imply that the Americans are searching for a place that satisfies the image of the land that *Evangeline* conjures. When I visited PEI in summer 2013, the Confederation Center of the Arts was mounting a new musical production of *Evangeline*.

[19] Montgomery confessed in her journals that "Anne's habit of naming places was an old one of my own" (Doody 417)

[20] In *Anne of Green Gables,* Diana invites Anne to attend an evening concert with her, after which they will be allowed to sleep in the spare-room bed. "'Think of the honour of your little Anne being put in the spare-room bed,'" Anne tells Marilla (213). Later, when Anne and Diana stay in Diana's Aunt Josephine's spare room during an exhibition in Charlottetown, the older Anne's opinion of the spare-room experience captures the essence of adolescence and sad truth of nostalgia. "'It was an elegant room, Marilla, but somehow sleeping in a spare room isn't what I used to think it was. That's the worst of growing up, and I'm beginning to realize it. The things you wanted so much when you were a child don't seem half so wonderful to you when you get them'" (309).

[21] For further examination of Gray's *Elegy*'s role in promoting and provoking literary tourism, readers should consult the "Anthology of Corpses" chapter of Nicola Watson's *The Literary Tourist,* the introduction to Paul Westover's *Necromanticism,* and Aaron Santesso's chapter on "Gray and the Emergence of the Modern Nostalgia Poem" in *Careful Longing: The Poetics and Problems of Nostalgia*.

[22] Montgomery had intended to end the *Anne* series after *Anne of Avonlea*, but her publisher's interest in Anne's lucrative prospects and sustained public interest in Anne led to seven more sequels. *Anne of the Island* was published in 1914, followed by *Anne's House of Dreams* in 1917, *Rainbow Valley* (a book about Anne's children) in 1919, *Rilla of Ingleside* (a World War I story) in 1921, *Anne of the Windy Poplars* (an epistolary novel about Anne at Redmond) in 1936, and finally *Anne of Ingleside* in 1939. Montgomery supposedly delivered an eighth sequel, *The Blythes Are Quoted*, one day before her death in 1942. *The Blythes Are Quoted* was a series of short stories linked by conversations between the Blythe family; many of those stories were published separately after Montgomery's death, but in 2012, the manuscript was published in full. Today, most readers approach the *Anne* series in this order: *Anne of Green Gables, Anne of Avonlea, Anne of the Island, Anne of the Windy Poplars, Anne's House of Dreams, Anne of Ingleside, Rainbow Valley, Rilla of Ingleside, The Blythes Are Quoted*.

Chapter IV: Concord, Massachusetts

[23] I learned from Asako Motohka, a presenter at the 2013 Orchard House Conversational series, that in post-World War II Japan, the government encouraged families to read *Little Women* in order to promote optimism and strength. Many Japanese families who lost fathers and sons in the war could identify with the March sisters, whose father is serving as a chaplain in the Civil War for most of Book I and whose sister, Beth, dies at a young age. Another presenter, Anne-Lore Francois, noted how, in France, an animated version of the story was very popular, and bootleg copies of the novel changed the ending.

[24] In an episode from the third season of *Friends*, Joey and Rachel swap favorite books; Rachel reads Stephen King's *The Shining*, and Joey reads *Little Women* and is horrified when Rachel reveals that Beth dies. Upset when Beth starts to get sick, Joey asks Rachel to put the book where he stows *The Shining* when it scares him: in the freezer.

[25] For further analysis of the thematic implications of Alcott's allusions to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, readers should explore Anne K. Phillips' "The Prophets and the Martyrs: Pilgrims and Missionaries in *Little Women* and *Jack and Jill*." In her article, Phillips examines Alcott's numerous references to Bunyan's work and suggests that *Little Women* is a reworking of the allegory, with characters like Mr. March and Marmee serving as the sisters' Evangelist and Help. She also discusses how the American understanding of a pilgrim—one who leaves fashionable society behind for greater religious freedom—also shapes the themes of the novel. Phillips suggests that the March trilogy's frequent allusions to pilgrimage are a call to readers to serve as examples for society. As the Marches, like the New England pilgrims, establish their own "colony" on the outskirts of Concord society, so must individual readers serve as spiritual and moral examples for their communities.

[26] Goethe had been a favorite poet of Alcott's since childhood and was a chief inspiration for the philosophy of Bronson Alcott and his transcendentalist circle. In her early teens, Louisa had read Goethe's *Correspondence with a Child* and imagined herself a second "Bettine," the young heroine of the poem, with the wise and eloquent Ralph Waldo Emerson as her "master," her "Goethe" (*Sketches* 219). Upon Emerson's death,

Alcott recalled how she would sing Goethe's poetry beneath Emerson's window and leave flowers for him on his doorstep. No doubt Alcott remembered her childish fancies as she peered into the windows of the poet's house and noted the "marble slab over the front door recording the date of Goethe's birth" (*Journals* 143). "I took a look at [the house] & wanted to go in as it was empty," she admitted in her journal, "but there was no time" (*Journals* 143). Reading Alcott's journals today, one wonders if the author ever anticipated that visitors would soon be peering into her windows!

[27] Biographers Harriet Reisen, John Matteson, and Eve LaPlante have all written extensively about Louisa May Alcott's relationship with her mother, including further explorations of the moments and quotations I have shared here. For a fuller picture of what drew mother and daughter to each other, I encourage readers to seek out these rich and nuanced examinations of Louisa May Alcott and her family's lives.

[28] In "A Power in the House," David Watters explains how Jo's comfort in marginal spaces like window wells, garrets, and hallways, as well as the way she sneaks into traditionally masculine spaces like libraries, demonstrate her emerging creativity and power. His essay explains how the Alcott and the March families utilize the architecture of the home to master the art of parlor performance rather than allowing the parlor (and the cult of domesticity) to master them.

[29] "Her face looked tired, grave, and rather sad; for to-morrow was her birthday, and she was thinking how fast the years went by, how old she was getting, and how little she seemed to have accomplished […] thirty seems the end of all things to five-and-twenty" (*Little Women* 343).

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