

# Lucy Maud Montgomery's Ephraim Weber (1870-1956): “a slight degree of literary recognition”

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## I

*Our genealogies are the narratives of a discontent with a history that lied to us, violated us, erased us even. We wish to locate our dislocation, and to do so we must confront the impossible sum of our traditions.<sup>1</sup>*

We join other Canadian literary historians in exploring the identity of a figure whose relative “absence” from certain Canadian literary studies, especially Montgomery studies, has become a little problematic. This figure is Mr. Ephraim Weber, a Pennsylvania-German Mennonite born in 1870 just outside the town of Berlin (what is now Kitchener, Ontario), homesteaded in 1896 in what is now Alberta, and died in 1956 in Victoria, B.C. Weber’s and Lucy Maud Montgomery’s 40-year epistolary relationship was announced dramatically by Wilfrid Eggleston with the publication of *The Green Gables Letters*<sup>2</sup> in 1960. Ever since then the presence of Ephraim Weber, with his attempt to represent a world so distinctly

remote from Montgomery's, has forced Montgomery scholars to take some pains in trying not only to identify but also to explain him. They have, in the process, tended mostly to rationalize and even apologize for Montgomery's long but essentially private association with one seemingly so removed from her world. He didn't seem quite right for her; his parents, his religion, his language, his culture: these seemed so unusual for anyone who might catch even the epistolary attention of Maud in 1902, when she was 27 and unmarried, and he 31. As Mollie Gillen quite plainly put it in 1976, it is the other of Montgomery's two life-long epistolary friends, George Boyd MacMillan, a Scot, and not Weber, whom we should regard as the man closer to Montgomery's "own spiritual wave-length"<sup>3</sup> (though he was not closer in age, and, indeed, was seven years her junior). At one level, of course, Montgomery readily would have agreed.

Eggleston, a fairly prominent Canadian journalist, novelist, teacher, and literary historian who from 1918 on knew Weber well (and was in 1920 Weber's student in Outlook, Saskatchewan) and who openly admired him as his first "spiritual or literary 'father,'"<sup>4</sup> learned about the remarkable quantity of the Weber/Montgomery correspondence only after Weber's death in 1956. In subsequently determining to construct Weber for a reading public in Canada in 1960, Eggleston found that he could readily enough fit Weber into a mosaic of prairie homesteading where many settlers or their forebears came from a spectrum of central European and other origins, and not only from the British Isles. But he could not so readily imagine his mentor finding a place within a specific Canadian literary picture within which the popular Maud Montgomery, herself one of Eggleston's favorite writers, was the centre of focus.

Eggleston, in his own autobiographical writing, has laboured to explain that Weber had to contend with "handicaps" as he struggled most of his life to become "a poet, essayist, and novelist." "Perhaps the most serious [of these] was that English was not his native tongue," he wrote, seemingly ready to share with a potentially receptive audience of "Montgomery 'fans'" and others his astonishment at the fact that Weber was twelve "before he spoke an English sentence."<sup>5</sup> Not only was Weber "twelve years old before he spoke any English," Mollie Gillen has somewhat apologetically echoed, but "there had been little culture in either his heredity or the farm environment of his youth.... At nineteen [this 'Canadian-born' man] had gone back to school with children little more than half his age and continued through high school to Normal School. Then, after discovering that teaching was an uncongenial occupation, he decided to follow his family to Western Canada...." She observed, further, that "[h]is literary pen friendships and his literary scribbings were a reaching out to the wider world of the intellect."<sup>6</sup> Indeed!

Luckily (for whom: Eggleston? Montgomery? Weber? us?) Weber "persevered." He acquitted himself, it seems, by reaching "high scholastic levels eventually in English (B.A. and M.A., Queen's, and all the course work needed for a Ph.D. at the University of Chicago),"<sup>7</sup> and so proved worthy of respectable reconstitution in Canadian literary history. (Indeed, Weber's high-school English

teacher, J.W. Conner, was also Mackenzie King's, Eggleston notes with pleasure, thereby keeping pace with Mollie Gillen's observation that Maud Montgomery was born the same day as Winston Churchill!)<sup>8</sup> And Weber even wrote English like Grove, Eggleston suggested (presumably implying, thereby, yet another word of praise and commendation), and "retained his mental faculties" to the end of his 85-year life. In 1956, anxious about students someday asking "blankly, Now who would this Mr. W. be?"—that "homesteader" to whom Montgomery wrote so many and such long letters—and concerned about students not finding Mr. W. in *Who's Who* or the *Encyclopedia Canadiana*—Eggleston tried to answer that question, and concluded his book, *Literary Friends*, with a line spoken by a school inspector in 1930, that Weber was "the best teacher of literature in Saskatchewan."<sup>9</sup> By largely restricting Weber's voice to summary or paraphrase rather than including the letters of both Weber and Montgomery in *The Green Gables Letters*, Eggleston of course was reflecting his own and other readers' high regard for Montgomery's stature. It is easy enough to see now, in an era when Canadian interest in "new" cultural voices has turned assumptions of thirty years ago topsyturvy, that Eggleston was simply enacting, perhaps unwittingly, some of the cultural determinants which then operated within Canada and which provided Eggleston's audience with comforting access to Scottish-Canadian literary associations such as Montgomery's. We might say now that he was also reflecting a collective uneasiness about Weber's Germanic inheritance and the questions raised for most Canadians simply by the sense of the strangeness of the Ontario Mennonite sub-culture out of which Weber came. Moreover, in striving to make Weber safe for Montgomery readers, Eggleston did not simply encase Weber in a box that hid his unMontgomery-like identity, but sought gently to encode him with images and symbols taken from cultural cues which Eggleston's "English" Canadian readers could readily understand.

Of course, any anxiety that Eggleston may have had about Weber's "otherness" in the still dominantly Anglo-Saxon world of Canada in the 1960s, any concern Eggleston may have experienced in trying to create an acceptably cleansed or purified and, with Montgomery in mind, culturally coherent portrait of Weber, only reflected Weber's own earlier, much deeper anxiety about his place in Canada and Weber's own complicated estrangement from, even suppression of, aspects of his earliest cultural and social identity. It had been Weber's personal effort to erase his background and to place himself solidly and unequivocally in an essentially uni-cultural Anglo-Canadian literary context that initially contributed to some Montgomery readers' turning Weber — when they learned a little about his earliest years — into the shadowy and cipher-like "pen-friend" blindly envious of Montgomery's background and culture. Thus, for example, absent from almost any definition we might have of Weber are nuanced traces of the cultural wealth in his Pennsylvania-German inheritance: the influence of his paternal great-grandfather, Benjamin Eby, a leading Mennonite bishop and educator in what is now Ontario, and the influence of his maternal grandfather, Jacob Y. Shantz (the subject of a recent biography by Sam Steiner),<sup>10</sup> a prominent business, religious, and political figure

within the industrial centre known until 1916 as Berlin, Canada. As submerged as Weber's Pennsylvania-German persona in his letters to Eggleston — who over a nearly forty-year friendship learned almost nothing of that “real” Weber — was Weber's appreciation of this philanthropic and visionary ancestor, Jacob Y. Shantz, who in the 1870s arranged the settlement of thousands of Mennonites from Russia in Manitoba, and in the 1890s of Ontario Mennonites (including Ephraim Weber) in what is now Alberta. Indeed, only in 1946, when Weber at age 76 finally experienced the shock of seeing his grandfather briefly appear in a historical account, did he dare to hope that his forebear might be more firmly inserted in any new version of Canadian history: “That bit about my Grandpa Shantz I might wish a bit amplified.”<sup>11</sup>

It is the gradual change in Weber's scrupulous and life-long effort to deny most of the traces of his cultural inheritance and conform to dominant cultural patterns that we will concentrate on shortly. We will find in Weber a man who from his late 30s to his 80s (and especially after he turned 65) kept revising, however gradually and conservatively, however reluctantly and cautiously, his own discrimination against himself, his own cherished pursuit of abstract ideals he could only have fulfilled awkwardly. But first he sought a non-Mennonite identity.

## II

In the many years of his close association with Eggleston, Weber (here again reminiscent of Frederick Philip Grove, who also hid his early German identity from Eggleston and, of course, others) had been able to camouflage his anxiety about his Pennsylvania-German, or “Mennonite,” identity, and insisted simply on lumping himself and Eggleston into a category he called Anglo-Saxon. Had he openly attempted to enter Montgomery's English-speaking circles in Prince Edward Island or in what he called old “imperialistic” Ontario, things, Weber felt, would have been much worse for him, and attempts at camouflage more difficult. So Weber did not mind writing letters out of a kind of solitude, a solitude that Montgomery, for her part, never betrayed or publically announced as she received letters that (as she said to herself in 1904 in her private journal) “sparkle from beginning to end.” “Mr. Weber turned out to be an ideal correspondent,” wrote Montgomery in her journal only two years after the intense literary correspondence of these two aspiring writers began; “His letters are capital. The man himself I rather think is a dreamy, impractical somewhat *shiftless* person, hampered also by delicacy of health. But his intellect is unquestionable. His letters are cultured, thoughtful, stimulating epistles to which I look eagerly forward. They are written

from a lonely ranch in Alberta...."<sup>12</sup> (When in 1928 in Ontario Montgomery met Weber, along with his wife Annie (Melrose), for the first time (when the Webers were motoring from Battleford to Quebec), she wrote about Weber in her private journal: "He is my old literary correspondent for nearly thirty years. We had never met before—and I do not feel that we have really met yet. We met more fully in our letters, where our real selves are expressed without fear of conventions."<sup>13</sup>)

Even his name, however, gave him away, and so, especially after World War I, a harsher loneliness was thrust upon him when he was stigmatized in a twentieth-century Canada resistant to his German marks of identity. Even on the prairies, where life was often determined by marginalized or marginalizing pressures, and its incongruities absorbed a little more easily than in a more hegemonic Anglo setting, Weber during his years as a teacher suffered social ostracism, as well as job discrimination, in the larger school districts.<sup>14</sup> But in being held at arm's length by the world, he was able to hold the world at arm's length, and select among his readers some, like Montgomery and Eggleston, for whom he would not have to produce daily utterance to the unspoken ironies inherent in his cultural differences with the world. Thus, Weber remained mysteriously elusive to readers of a 1974 work such as Francis Bolger's *The Years Before 'Anne'*, where he is alluded to over 50 times as someone present in Montgomery's life, yet is barely introduced except two or three times fleetingly as Montgomery's "platonic pen-friend for some forty years,... to whom she dedicated the novel, *The Blue Castle*."<sup>15</sup> Weber was, in effect, unavailable for any "imperialistic" readers of Bolger's study.

The presumably unintentional debunking of Weber, of Weber's intellectual background and cultural heritage, as palpable sometimes in Weber's own self-commentary as in scholars' studies of Montgomery, is effectively informed and illuminated by Weber's own letters—especially the soon-to-be-published letters written by him for a period of more than fifty years to one who was perhaps closest to his own "spiritual wavelength," Leslie Staebler. Staebler was a friend from Weber's high-school days in Berlin who at the turn of the century had moved to Fernie, B.C., with other Berliners from Waterloo County, Ontario, and who taught piano there. As is sometimes the case with writers, these letters—not unlike Weber's letters to Eggleston and to Montgomery—are far more exuberant and, perhaps, more stimulating and evocative than the poetry and fiction, essays and memoirs, which Weber was forever composing but only here and there succeeding in getting published. It was in his letters to Staebler that Weber gradually revealed some sense of his ironic view of his situation as a Canadian, of the discrepancies that his world included, of the gaps he routinely had to negotiate with quickly-built bridges constructed of materials he did not always understand. It is in his letters to Staebler alone—rather than to Montgomery or Eggleston—that Weber came to articulate without anxiety something of the internal contradictions characterizing what was, in effect, his exile in Canada.

In these letters to Staebler Weber admitted to adopting self-effacing postures

required, as he saw it, in the face of what he took to be the normative English-Canadian world's "reading" of the ethos, symbols, and signs of his own world. Only as time went on did he sense the possibility of beginning to assemble and emancipate the "Mennonite" selves he had hidden away, and grasp the opportunity to develop a rhetoric by which he might test the prospect of "normalizing" his own unique location within the generally intellectually stimulating spheres of Anglo-Canada. To be sure, in his letters to Montgomery we do see him suggesting tentatively to her (on July 7, 1908) that her Islanders in the just-published *Anne of Green Gables* were "wonderfully like [the] inland Waterloo County-ites in Ontario," among whom he had been nurtured in his first 26 years, but the possibility of that discussion was not sustained by Weber or Montgomery.<sup>16</sup>

With little support for a redemptive intellectual or cultural reading of his own world in his early decades of life, what condemned Weber in his own eyes, what reinforced his sense of deficiencies in his rural "Mennonite" roots, included, for example, the peculiar Pennsylvania-German dialect. Then, when he tried to develop a formal "German" intellectual identity in his graduate work at Queen's and, subsequently, Chicago, his efforts were rudely subverted by anti-German sentiment during World War I. Despite all his own early efforts to make details in the story of his life conform to a Canadian master-narrative that maintained Anglo-Canadian modes of culturally-coded expression at its pinnacle, Weber eventually, after World War I, when he was in his late 40s and early 50s, had to face the impossible double burden of simultaneously denying his ethnic "Mennonite" self and his academic "German" self as he attempted to move toward his goal of becoming an Anglo-Canadian writer.

For about twenty-five years, Weber, as an aspiring writer, dreamed about and struggled toward his entry into a national and international literary world. He spent hours corresponding with Staebler, Eggleston, and Montgomery—enjoying himself (as he said to Staebler) "exquisitely," imagining himself "lost in literary heavens," not the "lumber shack built on Alberta rock."<sup>17</sup> Well aware that he would be unable to force himself into what he saw as the established society based in eastern Canada (particularly Ontario) where, he rationalized, "the commonplace world runs in grooves," he boisterously argued in his early years that he preferred the "suspense of experiment" of the West, "the perennial half-thrill in waiting to see how unestablished things will establish themselves."<sup>18</sup> He praised Staebler for his love of piano, hoped he would become a renowned concert performer, a Canadian Liszt, and saw in their respective and also overlapping interests in literature and music the "twin-hints" of their personal links with "Infinite Beauty": "Yes, genuine music and genuine literature are twin-revelations of the Something we have no language for."<sup>19</sup> But at other moments he saw all too clearly that he was surrounded, where he had settled, by rude people committed mainly to a "cow life," to artistic expression at "country hoe-downs,"<sup>20</sup> and to the daily and seasonal demands of pioneering in the West: "Things are so unorganized and the spaces so big that the day goes over us with little effected.... I ... have to work out my salvation against husky frontier facts."<sup>21</sup> Even the multitude of ethnicities he encountered in the West

did not lend itself readily to a particularly productive or peaceful mosaic; with some dismay, he wrote: "There are Norwegians, Germans, French, Russians, Canadians, and Americans here, and we live in quiet discord among one another. We hobble the ugly demons of sect and race, but I wish we could forever corral them in the Nether Pit."<sup>22</sup>

For years he deliberately and carefully made a point of continuing to distance himself from the Mennonite and German-Canadian worlds he believed he had safely abandoned when he had left Ontario. "Are you all well and faithful Berlinites," he asked with perhaps a mild touch of disdain in a letter from Queen's University, where he had taken up studies in 1910; "I have lost interest for the most part in Berlin."<sup>23</sup> He had largely written himself out of the German-speaking neighbourhoods of his home town, and felt that Berlin's small-town ethos no longer inscribed him. In 1918, two years after Berliners changed the name of their city, he asked, as though from a half-bemused, yet half-interested distance: "Are the citizens happier now that Berlin is Kitchener? How are the Mennonites adjusting themselves to the war?"<sup>24</sup> He strove to live up to his earlier promise to himself to make up for what he saw as his personal "neglected culture" during his youth on a farm near Berlin: "I'd rather have culture and do without money."<sup>25</sup> He sustained himself with the view that he was engaged in a quest for what he had earlier called life's "finer and difficult achievements."<sup>26</sup> He "revelled" in Tennyson's magic; in Greek and Latin, French and German literature, in Homer and Virgil, in Shakespeare and Chaucer, in Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, and Herder. In the music of Mendelssohn, Beethoven, Wagner, and Mozart he saw the shape of what he aspired toward.

Of course Montgomery helped to sustain him in his Anglo-Canadianizing quest from 1902 on. Because he had never been trained to associate his own childhood world with artistic aspiration, Montgomery at first represented a means for him to remove himself ever further from his roots. In 1946, after she had died and when he was 76 years old, he told Staebler about his and Montgomery's kinship. Summarizing what had been his plight on the prairie and, on the occasion of this letter, indicating that in new media technologies there lay hope for later prairie generations' cultural aspirations, he hinted at the importance of his earlier intellectual kinship with Montgomery: "what a day of science is this, when, in dismaying remoteness the homesteader and frontiersman can hear major orchestras and metropolitan operas performed! The atom a solar system.... Infinities equal in infinity. Isn't science revealing a newer testament, a third one? This is what L.M. Montgomery and I said even back in 1930."<sup>27</sup> In a 1961 article in *Queen's Quarterly* — "Who was Ephraim Weber?" — Muriel Millen suggested that Weber's "contact with L.M. Montgomery was one of the few strokes of luck which came to him in his somewhat frustrating career. Ironically enough," she said, "his correspondence with her may gain for him, belatedly, a slight degree of literary recognition denied him during his life."<sup>28</sup> True. But Millen refrained from exploring whether Weber as letter-writer was one of the strokes of luck which came into the life and career of Montgomery.

## III

In 1943, when he was seventy-three years old, Weber confessed to Staebler: "Am reading the L.M.M. books again," and explained that he had become particularly "interested in Canadian literature. She has plowed fresh furrows in regional literature — P.E.I. — 'her Island.' Hasn't received a decent appreciation in Canada yet."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, he later feared she was so regional that an Ontario journal like the *Queen's Quarterly*, unlike the *Dalhousie Review* (which had just accepted two of his "personal essays" about Montgomery), would spurn his efforts to write about her: "afraid L.M.M. is too Maritime for its [the *Queen's Quarterly's*] Ontario taste."<sup>30</sup>

Weber's appreciative allusion in 1943 to Montgomery's having plowed "fresh furrows" in Canadian "regional" literature is telling, for in 1935 (when he was 65) he himself had turned in his retirement to writing "regional" literature, what became a "300-page Mennonite yarn of three sisters, Lucinda, Luanna, Luella, who found restrictions galling and broke away, only to be lassoed back by their rich aunt's will."<sup>31</sup> Toronto publishers such as Ryerson and Macmillan could have justified Weber's sense of his worth among Anglo-Canadians by publishing his novel, but they turned down what he at first dared call only a "yarn." By 1941, however, he saw his "Mennonite novel" as his one major achievement, though it lay abandoned in his drawer after having "roamed at large" among Eastern publishers "like an unherded ghost."<sup>32</sup> "Am keeping it pickled 'for the duration.' The yarn is spun of latter-day Mennonite characters, and as Macmillan's reader said, 'This is good literature, and different,' but they had a surplus of fiction on hand." So by that time — when he was in his seventies — he felt that he had become "a harmless sort of literary monk."<sup>33</sup> Finally, though, he was able to see that his 300-page story pointed toward a new kind of work that could help break the deadlock of homogeneity, that it represented an emergent Canadian "reading." He appealed to his friend Staebler, positioning him as exemplum of a new kind of Canadian reader, as "[o]f all people I can think of ... best qualified to read this bit of fiction: you know the Mennonite mores and the Pennsylvania Dutch soul, as well as the English language on its literary side."<sup>34</sup> Weber was testing in 1945 an expanded definition of Canadian "reading," a new interpretation of literature in English, and was, we must add, essentially accepting Eggleston's own words of encouragement a decade before, that Weber write something about the Mennonites.

When in the 1940s Weber found that Mabel Dunham's and Edna Staebler's regional (Waterloo County) texts were contributing to the fresh furrows of a new master-narrative that seemed to challenge centrist Anglo-Canadian literary ideals, he found the text of his own life coalescing more rapidly than ever — though a half-century too late — with new possibilities. Mabel Dunham projected in *Trail of the Conestoga* (1942) and *Grand River* (1945) the very world into which Weber had been born and in which he had lived for over twenty-five years, but which he had had such difficulty imagining in terms of literary form, or in terms of a Canadian



audience. When he read her work he was filled with exclamations at its revolutionary audaciousness as literature: "I grew up only a long mile from [the Grand River] and saw it a thousand times in all its moods and sizes and sylvan bends. For years there were [for me] two rivers on earth: the Grand and the *Irrawaddy*! I went to school at Bridgeport on the Grand, and the catchy name of the other [river] stuck in my ear. I fancied the [other] stream was wide, wide and long, long, and perhaps even half again as big and as deep as the Grand, but if I had known that the Grand was big and important enough to have a *book* written about it, I'd have easily classed it with the *Irrawaddy*, which was so far, far away, maybe seven hills and ten swamps away, among tigers."<sup>35</sup>

Weber liked the "tidy plain style" of Dunham's evocation of the Grand River area: "The old river we used to go a mile to bathe and splash in on a warm Saturday evening has assumed some little majesty for me; and I love to recall its huddly beauty of scenery at Bridgeport (our sheep used to be washed in it there), and the jungled banks where we used to swim, and the lovely plains with tall trees where it flowed past Natchez where my father grew up — under the big hill; a spot of bucolic beauty."<sup>36</sup>

When he and his sister Elsie read it aloud to each other, Weber found, to his own astonishment, that he deeply enjoyed, too, Dunham's uses of colloquial language: it's so "deliciously spiced with our native Pennsylvania Dutch.... How we laughed to hear our precious childhood idioms again, after so many years' neglect of them, as we took turns in reading it out to one another in the presence of Elsie's husband and my wife, who wondered what the laughing was all about, and whose laughs were merely an echo of our own."<sup>37</sup> Weber had suddenly recognized that an Anglo-Canadian reader is not always the primary reader of a "Canadian" work. He discovered for himself a new role as a literary "insider," at last. In his discoveries of fresh, ethnic and regional furrows, he found a new freedom. "[A]ch, ach, ach!"<sup>38</sup> he was able to chortle now in his letters, spontaneously giving in to idiomatic German or Pennsylvania-Dutch expression after decades of resisting it even in letters to his German-speaking friends (though he still harboured the more classical dream of someday enjoying with Staebler "an exalted week together somewhere under pine trees by flowing water and nature's scents.... Wouldn't it be heavenly to meet our teachers and old boys again 'somewhere afar,' all our shortcomings stripped off, only our best surviving!"<sup>39</sup>).

By the 1950s, upon hearing of musical enterprises being undertaken in his old home town, he was exclaiming jubilantly, "Ma foi! . . . 'Can any good thing come out of Kitchener-Waterloo' — with all its German origins? You'll show 'em, n'est-ce pas?"<sup>40</sup> And he declared approvingly of Waterloo County, "She's a great old county, tough and steady, and getting cultured."<sup>41</sup> The Mennonite and German area's artistic development in Ontario seemed to allow Weber to endorse and justify vicariously his own life-long struggle toward cultural respectability. Work such as Edna Staebler's (Leslie Staebler's daughter-in-law's) articles in *Maclean's* in the late 1940s were part of the new "getting cultured": "Her knack in writing up those Pensylfawney-deitsch folks hits the right chord in my mechanism. She has

such a way of selecting details! Even my Scottish-Canadian mate seems to have a warm response to those folk keys.... Edna has a fine sensibility for the folk-soul of humanity..."; "She has a *fine knack of catching up folk souls*."<sup>42</sup> It helped Weber, of course, to know that she had the blessing of central Canada's leading national magazine.

Upon McClelland and Stewart's publication of Mabel Dunham's *Kristli's Trees* (1947), Weber had expressed his astonishment and delight that a Mrs. Dr. Andrew Reid, D.D., "... who knows nothing of the Pennsylvania [Dutch] Mennonites," read it through "with keen interest," and that his own life could be read by a large audience, could become part of a new, larger narrative pattern: "[*Kristli's Trees*] seems to have good human interest as well as local Mennonite colour." He himself had found the book "heart-warming" and had read it with "tender interest," then had sent it to his brother and sister-in-law: "They both knew the Pennsylvania Dutch and the farmer life of the Mennonites, as I do too."<sup>43</sup> Weber even gloried in news of anniversary celebrations featuring a Conestoga wagon train imitating the migration of Mennonites from Lancaster (in Pennsylvania) to Waterloo in the 18th-century, underway in Kitchener, and let loose with a Pennsylvania-Dutch colloquialism—"un so veida"—in a 1952 letter to Staebler.<sup>44</sup> In 1952 Weber, finally happy with the "hundred rainbows [that] will probably settle on the shoulders of grand little Waterloo" with the glorification of the Webers' and other history even in "local school books,"<sup>45</sup> allowed himself pleasure at the thought of published texts in which his own family might appear as subject.

Although early on he had committed his life to an impossible transcendence of his cultural roots, Weber eventually saw—in the work of writers like Mabel Dunham and Edna Staebler—another, but more familiar, manifestation of what he in 1943 had referred to as Montgomery's "fresh furrows." The work of these Waterloo County writers was, for him, evidence of an alternative cultural world that he had once myopically by-passed: "I had to plow straight furrows to suit dad, ... and once I overheard dad agreeing with a neighbour how straight my furrows were, which tickled my new pride. Bless us, though, to what daintiness have the new generations of farmers [in Waterloo County] brought the fine art of plowing, ... [anticipating, there] the fine art of acting and music!"<sup>46</sup> In one letter to Leslie Staebler he had even ventured the reflection that there was a particular vigour in the German cultural sinews of the home-town he had earlier tried to erase from his life: "I think the German element, even if only as a derivational ghost, explains [the] musical prodigy of that town of yours."<sup>47</sup>

Weber's image of himself, like Eggleston's image of him, reminds us of various possible constructions in the shifting, culturally-determined ways we have of reading. We now re-constitute Weber yet again, to make him safe for our own literary world. His gradual emancipation, however partial, anticipates a kind of post-colonial model proposed by many ethnic-Canadians in Canada in the last three decades, as we move from denial and anxiety to discovery and articulation of our poly-cultural textual universe.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Robert Kroetsch, *The Lovely Treachery of Words* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.65. We presented the present paper to a joint session of the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English and the Association for Canadian and Quebec Literatures, held at the 1992 meetings of the Canadian Learned Societies at the University of Prince Edward Island in Charlottetown.

<sup>2</sup>Wilfrid Eggleston, ed., *The Green Gables Letters From L.M. Montgomery to Ephraim Weber 1905-1909* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1960).

<sup>3</sup>Mollie Gillen, *The Wheel of Things: A biography of L. M. Montgomery author of Anne of Green Gables* (London: Harrap, 1976), p.52.

<sup>4</sup>Wilfrid Eggleston, *Literary Friends* (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1980), p.125.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.126, 127.

<sup>6</sup>Gillen, p.46.

<sup>7</sup>Eggleston, *Literary Friends*, p.126.

<sup>8</sup>Gillen, p.1.

<sup>9</sup>Eggleston, *Literary Friends*, pp.127-128, 134.

<sup>10</sup>Samuel J. Steiner, *Vicarious Pioneer: The Life of Jacob Y. Shantz* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1988).

<sup>11</sup>Ephraim Weber, unpublished letter to Leslie Staebler, April 14, 1946. Weber was responding to Mabel Dunham's *Grand River* (1945), which we refer to below. We are currently preparing an edition of Weber's letters to Staebler for publication. See also Eggleston's Introduction to *The Green Gables Letters* for selected excerpts from Weber's letters to Staebler.

<sup>12</sup>L. M. Montgomery. *The Selected Journals of L. M. Montgomery, Volume I: 1889-1910*. Eds. Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 297. We are currently preparing a new edition of the Weber/Montgomery correspondence for publication.

<sup>13</sup>L.M. Montgomery. *The Selected Journals of L. M. Montgomery, Volume III: 1921-1929*. Eds. Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.374.

<sup>14</sup>Eggleston, *While I Still Remember: A Personal Record* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1968), pp. 71, 31.

<sup>15</sup>Francis W. P. Bolger, *The Years Before 'Anne'* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 1991 [1974]), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup>Weber, quoted in *The Green Gables Letters*, p. 69. So taken was she by the descriptions in his letters, Montgomery did encourage Weber to write at least about the world he found himself in in the Canadian prairies. Their correspondence began in 1902, six years after he had left Ontario.

<sup>17</sup>Weber, unpublished letter to Leslie Staebler, February 15, 1902. In the preceding five or six years Weber had been writing articles on topics such as religion and art, (for the *Young People's Paper*, published by the Mennonite publishing house in Elkhart, Indiana), and also poetry. For details, see Herbert Groh's "A Long-Neglected Son of Waterloo County" and Ivan Groh's "Ephraim Weber" in the *Waterloo Historical Society Annual Reports* for 1961 (pp.32-34) and 1962 (pp. 98-101). See also Weber's *Musings by the Way*, published in Victoria in 1957, shortly after his death.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, February 13, 1902.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, February 13, 1902.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, December 6, 1903.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, February 13, 1902.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, June 22, 1918.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, May 15, 1912. Weber had a few years before lived in Philadelphia and Cheever, New Hampshire; had enjoyed loafing a few days in New York City; was about to spend some years, during World War I, in Chicago, in Ph.D. studies.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, June 22, 1918.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, December 6, 1903.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, December 6, 1903.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, December 23, 1946.

<sup>28</sup>Muriel Millen, "Who Was Ephraim Weber?," *Queen's Quarterly* 68 (Summer 1961), pp.333-36.

<sup>29</sup>Weber, unpublished letter to Leslie Staebler, December 23, 1943.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, December 22, 1945. Ironically, it was in the *Queen's Quarterly* that Millen published her article. Weber published "L.M. Montgomery as a Letter Writer" in the October 1942 issue (pp.300-310) of *Dalhousie Review* and "L.M. Montgomery's 'Anne'" in the April 1944 issue (pp.64-73).

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, December 11, 1938.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, December 19, 1941 and December 11, 1938.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, December 23, 1943.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, October 13, 1945.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, December 27, 1944.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, April 14, 1946. Dunham's *The Trail of the Conestoga and Grand River* (with illustrations by Edward Cleghorn) were both published in Toronto by McClelland and Stewart.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, April 14, 1946.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, October 13, 1945.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, December 23, 1946.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, November 2, 1953.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, November 20, 1950.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, September 28, 1952 and November 22, 1952.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, March 12, 1949.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, July 2, 1952.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, July 2, 1952.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, December 10, 1954.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, December 23, 1946.