"A Shock of Joy": Transformative and triumphant Trauma in the Fiction and Life-Writing of L. M. Montgomery

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Abstract

L. M. Montgomery's engagement with war (both literal and symbolic) extends far beyond Rilla of Ingleside and her own personal distress during the catastrophic years of both World Wars. Those familiar with Montgomery's full bibliography know she repeatedly explored the effects of personal and social conflict on both a local and global scale. The majority of her characters endure severe trauma, abuse, or mental illness at some point in their lives, and the conflict surrounding these events often becomes the driving force behind the narrative. As one examines these recurring instances of trauma a fascinating pattern begins to emerge: trauma takes on curative and restorative powers. Characters who have been rendered severely dysfunctional by an initial trauma are cured of their ills by a subsequent traumatic event. By examining instances of what I have termed "triumphant trauma" in two of Montgomery's more mature novels, Kilmeny of the Orchard and The Blue Castle, in conjunction with her biography and extensive journals, the reader moves beyond the many simplifications of Montgomery's life and work. I argue that the literature she produced was neither a direct reflection of her life or simple escapism, but a very careful mediation between realism, fantasy, and psychology in her quest to save herself in world ravaged by war.

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Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD, is described as a severe response to trauma, and it is most powerfully characterized by three prominent symptoms, which include This is an extraordinarily distressing component of PTSD and manifests in the form of intrusive memories and flashbacks. Triggering memories provoke the amygdala, maintaining its hyper-activity. The third area of the brain affected by trauma is the frontal lobe; specifically, the PFC. This area of the brain is involved in regulating behaviors, impulses, emotions, and fear responses. In those with PTSD, the PFC is notably less active and less able to override the hippocampus as it flashes fragments of memory, nor to signal the amygdala that the danger is not real. The joys of my life. L. G. C. For Joan, Michael, and my parents, for all they have given.  Trauma and transformation: Growing in the aftermath of suffering / Richard G. Tedeschi, Lawrence G. Calhoun. p. cm. Includes bibliographical references and index.  Persons experiencing severe trauma reported more benefits than those who did not, on the PTGI score and on the following factors: New Possibilities, Relating to Others, Personal Strength, and Appreciation of Life. Females who experienced trauma received higher scores on the PTGI (M = 90.26) than did males (M = 73.48).