

L.M. Montgomery: at home in Poland

Barbara Wachowicz

When I stood on the stage of the Musical Theatre in Cracow — the ancient capital of Poland — after the first performance, in winter 1982, of our musical stage play based on L.M. Montgomery's *The Blue Castle*, I addressed the audience:

"My Dear Friends! Where do we meet here today? What is this enchanted 'Blue Castle' of our dreams? For us, it is our home. We meet here as the guests of the great Canadian writer Lucy Maud Montgomery, in a home created by her imagination.

"Once there was a time when the bloody glow of September 1939 spread out over Polish homes. In that year, Lucy Maud Montgomery's son, E. Stuart Macdonald, noticed that his mother suddenly turned grey and her hands began to shake so that she could hardly hold a pen. In 1942, the year of her death, L.M. Montgomery wrote to ask her long-time friend Ephraim Weber, to whom she had once dedicated *The Blue Castle*, 'what will happen to the world?'

"In 1944, when Stuart, by then a doctor on a British warship, fought for a better world, a young Polish boy scout going along Warsaw streets to join the August uprising, managed to send a letter to his father over the barricades: 'Daddy, we are passing away one after another like stones thrown by the hand of God against the barricades. But the stones are not being thrown into the void, not being wasted. We are standing firm, raising the walls of a big house...It does not matter if we die, as long as this house, our Polish home, will stand.'"

The Cracow audience at the 1982 premiere of *The Blue Castle* gave me a standing ovation when I reminded them of that Polish boy's words; and Larissa Blavatska, of the Canadian Embassy, told me — in Polish — on that night: "We all love home, no matter whether it is called the Blue Castle, Green Gables, Canada, or Poland."

L.M. Montgomery's love of her own beloved Prince Edward Island is immortalized in her letters, journal, and fictions. Anne of Green Gables dreams of going back home, to the hearth-fire "sending out its warm red glow athwart the chilly autumn nights." Gilbert's words about home, "I have a dream...I dream of a home," had stood as a motto in the diary I kept as a girl.

My own "Green Gables" was called Krzymosze-Bajki. It was a holding given as a dowry to my mother by my grandfather just before the war. It

lay in a silent green part of Poland called Podlasie where forests stretch for miles and miles. Its small manor-house overgrown with grape-vine still comes back to me in my dreams although it does not exist any more. Resinous tall pine-trees, violet thyme and bird-cherries stood on the banks of the small river Liwiec, where the cattle drank crystal-clear water; mal-lows, limes, chestnuts and maples stood there too: my brother and I collect-ed the maple leaves one autumn and hid them under the stairway to keep their flaming red colours for the winter. They shrank, withered and black-ened. But the memories of those days remained...

After I had lost the home of my childhood there came hard, hungry, cold and lonely years. I spent them in a hamlet near Warsaw where even the trees were painted black by the factory soot. And then my friends helped me, those friends that never fail – the people in my beloved books. Fore-most among these friends was a red-haired girl who walked with a light and dancing step, a girl with grey eyes. She always took me to her home, to Green Gables. Her name was Anne.

During the time of Stalinism in Poland it was not easy to get the books about Anne. Our library had perished when we were thrown out of our house; the whole series of “Anne”, so painstakingly collected by my mother before the war, was lost.

The first Polish edition of *Anne of Green Gables* (*Ania z Zielonego Wzgór-*



Barbara Wachowicz (in dark pleated dress) at the Première of The blue castle in Szczecin (Oct. 1982)

za) had appeared in 1912, only four years after its American publication. At that time Poland was still partitioned between three hostile world powers; for more than a hundred years it had not existed on the maps. To this tragedy the poem "The Downfall of Poland" refers, which, according to Anne, "is just full of thrills". But in each part of Poland, whether occupied by Russia or Austria or Prussia, Poles turned to Polish literature and to translations of world literature to find values which helped them survive. According to the distinguished Polish publisher Michael Arct, the novel by Lucy Maud Montgomery belonged to this kind of literature: it brought joy and trust into the human heart.

The second edition of *Anne* appeared in the free and independent Poland, in 1919. For a country in the process of reconstruction, with its divided parts beginning to be united, a programme of education became the most important task. The right literature for young Poles would help shape them into a dignified, noble, brave, and persistent people. In light of this aim, it is very significant that during the short period of twenty years between the wars *Anne of Green Gables* was published seven times. The last edition appeared in 1939. In that period *Anne of Avonlea* (*Ania z Avonlea*) was also published and underwent three editions; *Anne of the Island* also went into three editions — with two different translations and two different titles, the literal one (*Ania z wyspy*) and the one closer to the contents of the novel (*Ania na uniwersytecie/Anne at the University*). There were also translations of *Anne's House of Dreams* (*Wymarzony dom Ani*, 1931), *Rainbow Valley* (*Dolina Tęczy*, 1932), *Rilla of Ingleside* (*Rilla ze Złotege Brzegu*, 1933) and *Anne of Windy Poplars* (*Ania z Szumiących Topoli*, 1939). The "Emily" series was also translated, as well as *The Story Girl* (*Historynka*) and *Kilmeny of the Orchard* (*Dziewcze z sadu*). It is an interesting footnote that the 1912 edition of *Anne of Green Gables*, translated by Rachela Bernstein, listed the author not as L.M. Montgomery, but as "Anne Montgomery." This was not corrected until 1928. Also, the title underwent a metamorphosis because "gable" translates into an unpoetic "dormier window" in Polish. To retain the melodious ring of Montgomery's title, the Polish name became "Anne of the Green Hill". The Polish translators also consistently used the pet name "Annie" (*Ania*) instead of Anne (*Anna*).

First editions of these books were published by the different houses, the leading one being Michael Arct's firm. In 1923 a Commission for the Evaluation of Books was appointed to make lists of the most outstanding pieces of literature, both Polish and foreign, which should be found in school libraries. On that list, the first two volumes of the "Anne" books appeared. In the 1931 *Catalogue of Books for Children and Youth* the three first volumes of *Anne* received very high marks for their significant artistic and educational values. (One of the authors of that catalogue was the mother of the boy scout whose letter I quoted at the première of *The Blue*

Castle.) In 1932 a magazine called *Ruch Pedagogiczny* published the results of research carried out among young readers who had been asked: "What books do you like most and read most willingly?" *Anne of Green Gables* got fourth place, just next to the famous Polish classics written by Henryk Sienkiewicz and Bolesław Prus. Half a century later, it has moved up the scale.

In 1939, war came again. All the publishing houses stopped activity. However, in far-off Palestine where the Polish Mountain Corps were stationed after heroic battles in Egypt, the Publishing Section of the Polish Army in Palestine issued *Anne of the Island* among other world's classics. By May, 1944, soldiers — the readers of that cheerful story of Anne's adventures at the university — would be fighting on the Italian front, until the Polish white-and-red flag was hoisted at the top of the monastery of Monte Cassino, and the way to Rome was opened to the Allies.

During the euphoric years following the war, the private publishing houses resumed their work. Nevertheless, the attack on what was called "anachronist literature" soon began. In 1946 during the Conference devoted to the problems of children's literature, there were voices to exclude that kind of literature from the editorial plans, but Michael Arct, leading pre-war publisher and always a great entrepreneur, managed to publish the first three parts of *Anne*.

A solitary voice — but a significant one — had been raised in defence of LMM's novels. It was the voice of Maria Kann, author of cheerful and wise books for and about teenagers, teacher and scout instructor and head of the hospital during the defence of Warsaw in September 1939, a chief organizer of the Warsaw ambulance service run by scouts during the German occupation, and an enthusiastic and active member of the Rada Pomocy Żydom (A Council for Aid to the Jews) — a special body whose task was to provide documents and money for the Jewish children hidden and protected by Poles in defiance of the death penalty imposed for helping Jews. Maria Kann was the author of one deeply moving report on the extermination of the Jewish ghetto which was published by the underground printing offices in 1943 and distributed secretly by the young scouts at the risk of their lives. In another of her books, this one dedicated to the nurses of the Warsaw uprising, she wrote: "We look for people we can trust...we are all searching for the lost meaning of our lives."

During the 1946 conference Maria Kann also represented a powerful publishing house, "Czytelnik", which was owned by the state of course. In a moving speech, she called for literature "that would bring back life and joy to youngsters after those horrible years which devoured so many young lives, and had taken away youth and joy from those who survived." Maria Kann was such a great authority that even her strongest opponents listened attentively to her speech and her attitude tipped the scale in favour

of Michael Arct's being allowed to republish the first three volumes of *Anne*. He republished these on poor paper, without illustrations — but still they were immediate bestsellers. Although they were overlooked by the so-called “distinguished” and “serious” critics, one very interesting account of the books appeared in the *Tydzień* magazine (No. 2, 1948). It was written by Jerzy Wyszomirski, a poet, a soldier of the Polish Underground Army, and a hero of the Warsaw Uprising. Wyszomirski said that immediately after the war, when Poland lay in ruins, not only cities and villages needed reconstructing, but first of all, human values: cheerfulness, joy, and belief in the existence of good. All these, according to the reviewer, can be found in the “Anne” books. But also something more: in the history of the Polish nation, he said, especially since the last uprising against Russia in 1863, two attitudes have been in constant conflict: the positivistic and the romantic. The former emphasizes the necessity of economic development and is thrifty, down-to-earth, realistic. The latter, much more typical of Poles, implies romanticism, heroism, great dreams, and desperate fighting, always according to a code of honour. Jerzy Wyszomirski pointed out that the *Anne of Green Gables* series presents a clash of these two attitudes. The rational, positivist attitudes of many inhabitants of Avonlea are invaded by the romantic spirit represented by Anne. The ultimate synthesis of these two viewpoints constitutes the blend of “practical romanticism”, so needed in the difficult post-war period.

Copies of the three volumes published by Arct, with glued pages, in parts rewritten by hand, were in constant circulation in my school. We lent them to one another secretly, surreptitiously, and stealthily. We Polish girls needed the cheerfulness of “Anne”.

In the year 1953, the dark Stalinist night over Poland reached its peak. Hundreds of books were banished from the libraries. Private publishing houses were closed. Among the books banned from the bookstores and libraries was a really great one — *Stoning the Barricades* (*Kamienie na szaniec*) by Aleksander Kamiński, the co-founder of the Polish scout movement, the editor of the underground press during the Nazi occupation, and the heroic commander of anti-German sabotage. That sabotage, the so-called “small sabotage”, was performed by the boy scouts who risked their lives distributing anti-German pamphlets, writing anti-German slogans on the walls, and pestering Germans by every possible means imaginable to their ingenious minds. *Stoning the Barricades* is the documentary story of a troop of these scouts who, under pain of death, rescued their eighteen-year-old commander from the hands of the Gestapo who were torturing him. The boy scout whose letter I quoted at the first performance of *The Blue Castle* had been a member of that group.

So *Stoning the Barricades* was forbidden. Even the Nobel Prize winning Henryk Sienkiewicz fell into disgrace: he was the author of a series of

historical novels written “to raise the spirit of the nation” during the darkest years of partitioned Poland, and also the author of a wonderful book for children, *Through the Desert and the Jungle* (*W pustyni i w puszczy*) which teaches young people courage and refusal to accept any kind of treason. The forbidden *Anne* was in excellent company.

The newspapers, following the dominant cultural assumptions of socialist-realism, showered abuse on the “novels for girls”: “full of exaltation, and unreal”, “filled with mawkish sentimentalism and obscure social ideology...”

The exile lasted until October 1956. Then Nasza Księgarnia, the publishing house which since 1950 had dominated the children’s literature market, published *Anne of Green Gables*, followed by *Anne of Avonlea* and *Anne of the Island*, in 1957. They were greeted by a review entitled “Anne’s Triumphant Comeback” which appeared in a serious magazine, *Praca Świetlicowa* (No. 12, 1956). The Anne books disappeared from the bookstores in a twinkling of an eye. Alas, they also disappeared from the libraries. Anne’s fans admitted their theft. They agreed to pay high fines. They wanted to have them. Forever. At home.

A new chapter of “Anne’s” career in Poland had begun, the one precisely documented in many dissertations making use of the research on the reading habits of the 1960s. In 1958 researchers and high school students, when asked the question “What sort of books would you write if you were a writer?” often chose Montgomery’s novels as their models.

Irena Słońska, an outstanding scholar in the Institute of Children’s Literature at the Warsaw University, in her book *Children and Books* (Warsaw, 1959), meditates on the enduring popularity of “Anne”:

Anne possesses a special gift: she knows how to live. Her curiosity about life is insatiable. She takes life with zest and with admiration...The author endowed her not only with sensitivity but also with the imagination which could widen her range of experience. “Anne” means unusual ideas, original games, names which can endow a new beauty on things... Anne is a unique individual but at the same time she is a psychological generalization. Girls often tend to exaggerate with their imagination and Anne possesses this feature in the full sense of the word. She experiences everything deeply and fully. Her language is full of high-sounding words. “But if you have big ideas you have to use big words to express them”, says twelve-year-old Anne, and only when she is sixteen do her words get simple though her thoughts are still “big”. Anne knows how to dream but she does not allow herself to be possessed by dreams. Although she gives play to her imagination, she is also able to think. Under the enthusiasms of a twelve-year-old girl we can feel the emerging psyche of an interesting woman...She confronts her duty with courage, still not giving up her plans though their realization will not be easy. *Anne of Green Gables* by means of its optimistic atmosphere tells its young readers: “You will get a lot from life if you go and meet it with good will, your eyes open to the wonders of the world, and with a sensitive heart.”

Research on reading habits in the years 1958-59 (published in *The Book*

and *Today's Young People* by Anna Przeclawska, Warsaw, 1962) resulted in the list of a thousand books most often read by the young. *Anne* got the 10th position, next to bestsellers such as *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell, *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas and *Trilogy* by Henryk Sienkiewicz. The author of this survey quotes a girl who rejects Françoise Sagan's *Bonjour Tristesse* as representative of modern girls: "You can still find Annes of Green Gables among us".

An M.A. thesis entitled "The Role of the Book in Creating Young People's Philosophy" written by Krystyna Zabrodzka and presented at the Warsaw University in 1959 listed books which were the most popular among Warsaw high school students. For the girls the list begins:

1. L.M. Montgomery, the *Anne of Green Gables* series
2. M. Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind*
3. S. Undset, *Kristin Lavransdatter*

The boys place in the first position *Stoning the Barricades*.

In 1962 a thousand schoolchildren from towns and villages of the Płock district listed favourite literary heroes. The list included Stas, the brave teenage hero of Sienkiewicz's *Through the Desert and the Jungle*, who leads a seven-year-old girl through thousands of dangers in Africa; Winnetou, the hero of a series of adventure novels by K. May; Zbyszko of Bogdaniec, a youth bravely fighting against Germanic bandits who invaded Polish territory in the years before 1410 and the Polish victory at Grunwald; and Nemecek, a moving boyish character from the Hungarian novel *The Paul Street Boys* by F. Molnar. The only girl in this company was Anne of Green Gables.

A study titled "Anne among Girls" by Wiesława Szokalska-Pielasińska was included in the collective work prepared by the Institute of Children's Literature (Warsaw, 1960). It asked the following questions:

1. Is *Anne of Green Gables* still read willingly by twelve to seventeen-year-old girls? What are the reasons for the selection of this particular book? What are the reasons for the first and the subsequent readings of the novel and are there any consequent differences in reception?
2. What are the elements that young people pay special attention to and/or find interesting?
3. Do the problems presented in the book still concern contemporary readers?

This research, which was carried out in 1960, included interviews with Warsaw schoolgirls and with young readers in the Warsaw libraries as well as an inquiry published in the most popular girls' weekly *Filipinke*

asking a slightly different set of questions.

Filipinke received 359 letters from all over Poland which was a record response. They were mostly written by sixteen to seventeen-year-old girls who had reached for the "Anne" series between the ages of ten and thirteen. "I got this book at the time when no adult person could understand my fantasy and Anne — a book and a friend — helped me in a difficult adolescent life making my life much more beautiful and the people seem much better", a thirteen-year-old girl wrote about her first meeting with "Anne".

Who suggested to the teenagers to open the covers of *Anne of Green Gables*? It had been included in the supplementary reading list for the fifth grade, but most girls found the book incidentally: they mentioned the role of the radio programme (they got interested in the book when an interesting fragment was on the air), the suggestions of their friends, and finally the recommendations of their parents, librarians, or teachers, who had been under the spell of their own memories. The great majority read *Anne* three or four times from cover to cover, coming back again and again to the most interesting fragments which accorded with their needs and moods. "I liked to read it especially when I was tired or upset. Then I sought help in Marilla's common sense and Anne's cheerfulness", says a sixteen-year-old from Warsaw. Or: "I think it is impossible to be bored by this book, I have read many delightful books which at first overshadowed *Anne*, but then she always came back with a smile, full of crazy ideas and not at all angry that I had forgotten her for a while."

The most interesting and the best part of the series is, according to the girls, the first one — *Anne of Green Gables* (159 votes), then the third volume — *Anne of the Island* (125 votes), and the first and third together (27 votes). "Although all the volumes are nice, yet none of them presents Anne so directly, and describes such a variety of emotions as the first one..." "I did not like the later books. Mrs. Blythe is completely different from Anne. In the world where Mrs. Blythe lives, only good and noble people exist, there are no great troubles or miseries." "In the third part my own dreams are reflected. Anne, to whom learning was a dream of the lifetime, is particularly close to me." For both teenagers and almost grown-up girls, *Anne*, who grows up together with them, is a source of important values.

"I met Anne when I was at the same age as she, I keep going with her, I try to follow her, she saves me when I'm alone and sad because I'm not a beauty with an alabaster brow and I don't have beautiful ball-dresses and I am not always happy; Anne saves me and right away I'm glad that I'm young and healthy, I enjoy life, I'm happy for others — and everything thanks to Anne. Yes, 'All's right in the world' when you can live as Anne does" (D.D. from Maków Podhalański). "This character must be real since

she has so many followers in reality” said J.D., a 10th grade student from Ozorków. The girls emphasize Anne’s characteristics such as cheerfulness, ingenuity, romanticism and daydreaming, kind-heartedness, truthfulness, sincerity, and optimism.

For the majority of the young readers, to live like Anne means to be similar to her. It is important to have a purpose in life and perseverance in achieving it, ambition, a talent for winning people’s hearts and a gift for making the world brighter. “I love her because she understands her pupils and every child. I dream about being such a teacher as Anne was. I’ll be a teacher in a year’s time but when I start to make my way in the world I’ll never forget Anne and the values she represents”, says Stenia, a College of Education student from Knurów.

However, analyzing the question of whether Anne could live nowadays, the girls became uneasy and anxious. “Though I believe Anne is a real person, I would be afraid to bring her to my class. Anne had faith in the good element in people and in the beauty of the world. She wouldn’t feel well among us. Her dreams would be ridiculed and her every act would be strictly controlled and slandered.”

They say: Anne is close to us, she is just like us, we want to take after her because she is good-hearted and wise; yet they fear that our era might deprive her of all her charm; they do not want her to be misunderstood or ridiculed. The student from Lublin may be right in saying: “I am sure there are a lot of Anne-like girls nowadays but for some reason their hearts stiffen and they try to appear different than they really are.” In their letters to the editors, these girls showed what their real thoughts were.

According to the study, many more girls prefer to be like Anne than to have a friend who would resemble her. They doubt that such a girl can really exist, they are disappointed in friendship or, thinking that they themselves are Annes, they do not want to share Anne’s qualities with anybody. One of them says: “You cannot be Anne because I am Anne. I would like to have a girlfriend but she would have to be like Diana.” Very often they are satisfied with a fictitious Anne whose great value is that she never fails them.

As Anne grows up, modern girls notice more differences between her and themselves. Her first love and an ideal boyfriend more or less correspond with their dreams; however, the picture of their future homes and families most often look quite different. Almost all of them (318) like Anne’s love for Gilbert and they would like to experience their first love in such a romantic way. Their motives are mature and reasonable — this love was based on a long-lasting friendship, it was not a love at first sight. Anne and Gilbert had common plans and aspirations; they had mutual respect for each other. Some girls bear a grudge against Anne for not reciprocating Gilbert’s feelings for such a long time; they would prefer Anne and Gilbert

to understand each other from the very beginning. Nevertheless, they admire Gilbert for his perseverance which, they believe, is what today's boys lack.

Gilbert captivated 332 girls' hearts. He comprises all the qualities their chosen man should possess, such as being educated, intelligent, generous towards others, tender, and at the same time he is handsome, resolute, honest and faithful. But almost all of the girls doubt if they will manage to meet such a boy. "Today's boys are cynical, very often rude and vulgar and they want to kiss right away." "Gilbert is my ideal, but I don't think I'll be able to find such a boy in the real life — he is too ideal, he has no vices."

There are voices full of sadness and disappointment, especially among older readers. "Unfortunately, life is not a novel. Our love affair did not end up with a wedding at high noon under the green trees, nor did we move to the home by the sea, we parted simply because he stopped loving me" (a 21-year-old girl from Łódź). But optimistic voices might appear as well. "If I had not read this novel I would have fallen in love with any boy like other girls do, but now I am looking for a boy like Gilbert."

What are the girls' plans for adult life and dreams of their homes? Nearly all of them like the atmosphere of Anne's home, full of warmth, kindness, understanding and love. Anne's family is an ideal. But the real home is completely different. It is adapted to the conditions they live in, it is modern, comfortable, often not so remote from the city (108 students). "My house of dreams will not be a house, but a modern flat in a block of flats. My house will have colourful walls and huge windows facing a green orchard. It will be furnished with light and modern pieces of furniture. I will have large heaters in all the rooms so that in winter my children can play on the floor in socks. I will have a refrigerator in the pantry and a washing machine in the bathroom. The atmosphere will be as radiant as that in Anne's house."

A large group of readers say "no" to having as many children as Anne had. They say they cannot afford it. They want to have two or three children at the most. More often than not, they want to work professionally, and they wonder that Anne is only a housewife. There are words of criticism: that Anne's house is "too happy", e.g., artificial. But despite all the differences arising from the generation gap, the opinion that Anne is "charming", "very close", and "dear", and the book "very special" prevails. "When there are more books about us, it will be easier to find and choose an ideal, because life is not worth much unless you have something that sets an example, something you can believe in, something to guide you," a seventeen-year-old, D.D., from Maków Podhalański, says. Anne is such an ideal and that is what gives the book its enduring popularity. "When I was reading this book I felt that I was a better person, I wanted

to do something good, smile at everybody and wish everybody to be happy.” “The novel reflected my own thoughts and dreams, I found the sense of life, I regained my strength and started to smile again.” “This novel encouraged me to read more.” “Nowadays it is in the fashion to seem cold, pessimistic, and reserved, but I’m a bit romantic and that is why I enter Anne’s world so willingly and I love to stay with her, among good-hearted people living a calm optimistic life.” “Anne has taught me to look at the world differently. I have started to observe nature. I can see its phenomena, not only with the eyes of reality but also with the eyes of imagination. I have even learned to like a storm, and I was frightened of them before. I can see a lot of beauty in sunrises and sunsets. I have learned to appreciate the beauty of the seasons. This has made life easier and more joyous for me.”

Since 1960, further research has documented the continuing phenomenon of LMM’s novels. Irena Lepalczyk in her dissertation “The Reading Problems of High School Students” (Warsaw, 1965), based on inquiries conducted among secondary school students (ages fifteen to 21) from the industrial city of Łódź, says: “Anne...still holds an important position. Everything in her captivates the readers: love for nature, intelligence, broad imagination, romantic personality, her quest for knowledge, strong will and ambition.”

And Anna Przećławska in her book *Young Reader Today* (Warsaw, 1966) presents a list of the favourite books of

- I. school children from big cities, small towns and villages:
 1. *Anielka* (a classic Polish novelette by Bolesław Prus, included in the obligatory reading list). Its heroine is a sensitive little girl who, because of her father’s carelessness, loses her home.
 2. *Anne of Green Gables*
 3. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*
 4. *The Paul Street Boys* by F. Molnar
- II. high school students from big cities:
 1. *Trylogia* (a historical classic by Henryk Sienkiewicz which has been read by generations of Poles)
 2. *Anne of Green Gables*
 3. *The Three Musketeers* by A. Dumas
 4. *Quo Vadis* by Henryk Sienkiewicz

The author comments on these lists: “*Anne of Green Gables* occupies a prominent position. The sensational career of this novel among several generations of young girls, including the present generation, is due to its vibrant atmosphere, cheerfulness, humour... The girls insist that novels evoking such emotions as *Anne of Green Gables* are scarce or non-existent.”

Summing up the reception of *Anne of Green Gables* in Poland in the

decade of 1956-66, professor Halina Skrobiszewska, the sociologist and psychologist, says in the *Wychowanie* magazine:

At the time of its first publication *Anne of Green Gables* was quite exotic morally and it was more democratic than other books for girls....The readers were and still are fascinated with the charming heroine...who tried to be useful wherever she found herself: she was "a pest," but at the same time she was goodhearted and intelligent, ironic and sensitive, and endowed with poetic imagination. Today's girls are still under the spell of the atmosphere of Green Gables, full of mutual kindness, the stillness of the beautiful country-side.... In addition, *Anne* was a very well-written novel... Green Gables, isolated from the tumult of life, where everything concentrates on friendship, kindness, and growing up among the closest friends and relatives, fulfills young girls' crucial psychological needs. The novel is a literary and psychological phenomena based on Montgomery's extra-ordinary understanding of a girl's psyche, and it shatters the taboo on women developing their individuality, and on their being sensitive only to dreams and emotions.

After 1970 a new chapter in the post-war history of Poland began. Those who had been governing the country disgracefully lost the trust of our society and hence ended their "rule" when they issued an order to shoot at the shipyard workers in Gdansk. The deceived and tormented Polish nation once again believed in the chance for revival.

25 years had passed since the end of World War II — a new generation — born in independent Poland — was growing up. Different trends came and went, authorities fell into oblivion; a period of comparative welfare had begun. Did the old-fashioned girl from Green Gables still hold her power over the seemingly different young people living in a far-away — in every sense of this word — country like Poland?

Let me recall my personal experiences. In the years 1972-1975 I worked on a book later published under the title *It is only you I love* (*Ciebie jedną kocham*). The title comes from the diaries of Stefan Żeromski (1864-1925), a great Polish novelist from the turn of the century. I wanted to tell the history of the scrap of Polish land in the barren yet beautiful Świętokrzyskie Mountains, a place which had become Żeromski's "true homeland". Żeromski, called "the conscience of the nation", fought all his life so that "the wounds of the nation would not scar over with the membrane of ignominy". "It is only you I love, my wonderful land," he wrote. "You were created to support the weakness of our souls, to enhance our fragile emotions."

Żeromski, the son of a poor tenant farmer, orphaned as a small child, kept coming back to his native village in his books. Just as Lucy Maud Montgomery used to say, "I am part of the Island", Żeromski said about Ciekoty: "This village is a part of my soul". In my book I wanted to tell the full story of Żeromski's homeland from the time the first settlers had hewn down the famous fir trees (1683) until the present day. As a part of

my research, I asked the young people (between the ages of fourteen and sixteen) from the local schools to keep diaries for the period of one year. What an extraordinary piece of literature they provided!

Those children came from desolated and very poor villages. The sheds that housed their schools were falling to pieces, and were so cold that in winter water froze even if you kept it by the stove. Yet the most beautiful human values, like bees in amber, were preserved in the hearts of those children — values such as patriotism, filial affection, respect for people and attachment to the land.

One of these diaries was by a small, fragile fourteen-year-old girl with fair braids and blue eyes — a typical Polish country girl. Her parents — poor peasants — had probably never read books. But Alicja Sokoł's diaries showed a child of unusual intelligence, great sensitivity, and extensive reading. She wrote:

May 16, 1973. When cows are grazing on the boundary strip, you have to keep them on the chain all the time. It's uncomfortable but still you can read. And I was reading *Anne's House of Dreams*. Oh, Anne, Anne I'm so happy I've met you again.

August 16. Today we were threshing wheat, barley and rye and then we had to carry the sheaves to the barn. They were very heavy. I was really sleepy but I managed to read a little of *Rainbow Valley*. My soul, my heart and all my thoughts were with my dear friends from Green Gables. I love every sentence, every word of this book. But I like most the passages in which Anne appears. Although I know that she is 41-years-old already, for me she is and always will be the young Anne with whom I share so many experiences and emotions.

August 21. People are already raking up the stubble fields. We use ordinary rakes because there is only one hayraking machine in the whole village. Later, in the evening, my back was hurting me very much, but I didn't mind. In my thoughts I visited Ingleside and Rainbow Valley again.

November 22. I was studying till late at night and then I opened *Anne of the Island*. All day long I'm anxiously waiting for these most beautiful moments for there is nothing more wonderful than meeting Anne, Diana, and Gilbert. When Anne goes back to Green Gables it seems to me that I'm going back with her, that I'm going back home.

June 21, 1974. We were cocking hay on the meadows, then it started to rain. I was reading *Rilla*. The happy days of her childhood spent in Rainbow Valley were gone. The Pied Piper was playing. Then Walter's death. I couldn't stop crying. Oh, Walter, you must have really existed, you, with your romantic soul like your mother's. This can not be fiction!

July 22. We were weeding out thistle from barley all day long. As a reward for all the work, I read *Rilla of Ingleside* till late at night. I feel that I found my old friends again. I'm sure that the writer understood, knew, and loved nature. I'm sure that she saw the beauty of life in every, even the dullest day. Could anyone create such characters without being one of them?

Many years later I quoted some passages from Alicja's diary to Mrs. Catherine Cameron, the wife of the ambassador of Canada to Poland, who attended the first performance of *The Blue Castle* in Wrocław. She was

astonished at the phenomenal response to Montgomery's works. "I don't think", she said, "that young people in Canada still read these books in such a way."



Alicja Sokół in 1984 making a presentation to Mrs. Ruth MacDonald in Cracow, Poland.

Perhaps it's worth mentioning what happened to Alicja Sokół, this faithful admirer of L.M. Montgomery's novels. Having graduated with honours from a medical school, she was admitted without entrance exams to the Medical Faculty in Cracow, where she became a straight 'A' student. In two big cities, she organized a very efficient system of medical care for old people. Her field of

specialization is geriatrics.

In the same years that my research on *Ciekoty* led me to this gifted young reader of the *Anne* books, a distinguished educator was presenting more general findings on *Anne's* popularity. In an interview published in a professional magazine, *Nowe Książki (New Books)*, Professor Krystyne Kuliczowska chose *Anne of Green Gables* as a point of departure for discussion on the way classical literary works function today. Trying to answer the question why young girls in the 1970s were still enchanted by this novel, Prof. Kuliczowska said:

Anne is a person who can shape her own life; she professes an original philosophy: to mark her existence among young people by making them happy. Anne spreads around her the atmosphere of cheerfulness and optimism, which is not easy at all, nor is she an easy optimist. She is a symbol of an affirmation, of a vivid and emotional relation to the world and people. She is a nonconformist, she rises against hypocrisy and conventions. She is full of enthusiasm to transform the world. Yet, the novel is written "without a hint of moralizing". What is more, it contains invaluable pedagogical trends, formulated only in the times of Janusz Korczak (in the 1930s): "novels for adolescents should show in an honest way that adults can make mistakes in raising and educating children." And it is *Anne of Green Gables*, a novel from the beginning of the century, which demonstrates adults using faulty pedagogical methods and thus causing problems in the child. Today, we would call this innovation in children's literature.

When asked about the drawbacks of the later volumes, Prof. Kuliczowska says: "Anne belongs to these literary heroes destined to stay in everlasting childhood, like Peter Pan or Alice in Wonderland. She should never have been allowed to grow up." But Anne as a young girl "will always be around."

That those last words of K. Kuliczowska are true can be confirmed by the fact that in the stormy years of the early 1980s, when the political and economic situation of Poland has changed drastically, the novels by LMM still appealed to the readers. The literary critic, Maria Bojarska, in the

article published in *Nowe Książki* (No. 4, 1981) concluded:

[L.M. Montgomery] describes girls and women who are neither obedient dummies nor compendiums of incomprehensible, fatal passions; she tells about people who are simple but not coarse, people who are complicated but not tendentiously distorted. Small, provincial realism? An ordinary novel about ordinary people? Well, it is easy to say so today. Anyway, can the heroines of LMM be called “ordinary girls”? They are misunderstood, they happen to be ridiculed or sometimes even seriously hurt — ugly ducklings living among pretty, healthy, and self-complacent ducks. The secret of the success of Montgomery’s books depends perhaps on the fact that it is not easy, despite all appearances, to identify with her heroines.... But such an identification, rare as it is, can take place sometimes, and then Montgomery’s works cheer a reader up, support him, and give him encouragement.

The magazine for adolescents, *Płomyk*, every year awards the Eagle’s Feather Prize to favourite contemporary writers chosen by Polish youth. In 1982 — an eventful year of political and economic crisis — the tradition of awarding that prize only to contemporary writers was broken. Which authors were chosen by Polish youth? Henryk Sienkiewicz in the first place. (It is significant that his books, which have always made us regain our national spirit, appealed more to the readers when the situation of the country was uncertain or dangerous.) Who won the second prize? The author of *Anne of Green Gables* — Lucy Maud Montgomery.

A sixteen-year-old, W.P. from Nowa Wieś, gave the reasons why she voted for *Anne of Green Gables*:

I think that books are like living creatures. Some you like more, others — less. Maybe your heart prompts you which one to choose just as it does when you choose yourself a friend. I think I don’t have to introduce *Anne of Green Gables* to anybody. I got this book quite accidentally. I had to read it because I took part in the Polish literature school contest and *Anne* was on the obligatory reading list. Since then I’ve read *Anne* six times at the least. My mother laughs that I know this novel by heart. But every time I read it I discover something new in it.

In spring 1983 I received a letter from a graduate of the English Philology Department at the Łódź University. Krystyna Agnieszka Sobkowska told me she was hoping to write an M.A. thesis on “The Reception of the *Anne of Green Gables* series by Lucy Maud Montgomery in Poland”. She wrote:

Anne has always been my dearest literary heroine and many friends of mine are also fascinated by her and know all *Anne* books almost by heart, so I thought that “my duty” was to take these novels as a subject of my thesis. My university friends prepare very serious dissertations on outstanding figures in American literature such as Walt Whitman or Emily Dickinson: the only topic connected with *Anne* which I managed to get accepted was the reception of *Anne* in Poland.

The thesis, the result of arduous work of its author, covers 70 years of

Anne's "reign" in Poland and presents extremely interesting data. During the period between 1948 and 1980, *Anne of Green Gables* and *Anne of Avonlea* ran through seven editions in Poland, *Anne of the Island* through seven as well, *Anne's House of Dreams* and *Rainbow Valley* through six, *Rilla of Ingleside* through four and *Anne of Windy Poplars* through two editions. Altogether since 1948 (and until 1982), 39 editions of the *Anne of Green Gables* series appeared in Poland and the number of copies amounted to 2,039,522.

In the spring of 1958 I wrote a review entitled "The Comeback of Anne" in the *Ekran* magazine (No. 27, 1958). In response to the first adaptation of *Anne of Green Gables* shown on Polish TV, which had started broadcasting only a few years before, I wrote: "This skinny, red-haired girl of Avonlea with thoughtful grey eyes is the dear literary heroine of thousands of little girls. Her comeback...is a great credit to The Youth Theatre of Warsaw TV." Adapting the novel to the stage, Andrzej Konic limited its plot to several key episodes. He excluded Anne's adventures at school (teenagers have not forgiven him for that) and removed the figure of black-eyed Gilbert (for which many girls will bear him a grudge forever). Technical difficulties and the necessity of low operating costs enforced the decision to cut out many scenes like the Lake of Shining Waters and the White Way



Danuta Przesmycka as "Anne of Green Gables" on Polish TV (1958)

of Delight. All that was left from the honey-scented clover fields, meadows covered with feathery fern, and snow-white cherry trees were artificial apple tree blossoms peeping shyly into the Green Gables kitchen where all the action of the play took place. In spite of these cuts the viewers were enchanted by the production, mainly because of the delightful performance of Anne by Danuta Przesmycka in whom they found the image of a little dreamer from Prince Edward Island. In the same year, 1958, Danuta Przesmycka won a special award for this role and in addition, the Ministry of Culture awarded her for all her artistic achievements in theatrical productions for children. She said at that time:

It was a great treat for me to play this role. Anne was one of the most charming figures of my childhood. I like that type of role revealing the psychological development of a person from childhood to maturity. That is exactly how I tried to present Anne Shirley's growth, from a small, pathetic little girl who either was in the depths of despair or in dizzy realms of delights, to a grown-up woman, who guards her dear pretty thoughts like treasures in her heart.

The tremendous success of the TV production encouraged the director and adapter, Andrzej Konic, to prepare a theatrical adaptation of the novel. Thus, on September 26, 1963, *Anne of Green Gables* started its triumphant run in theatres all over Poland. During the first two seasons (1963-1964, 1964-1965) it was staged simultaneously by fifteen different theatrical companies. Eighteen of William Shakespeare's plays (in 971 performances) were seen in the 1963/64 season by 440,914 spectators. The audiences of *Anne of Green Gables*, which had 961 performances, amounted to 453,697 people. The third most often watched playwright, Molière, was lagging behind, his plays getting audiences of only 256,465 people.

During the following season L.M. Montgomery surpassed Shakespeare. *Anne of Green Gables* had fourteen productions accounting for 1,143 performances and an audience of 521,774 people, whereas fourteen of Shakespeare's plays had 1,717 performances and were seen by 337,020 spectators.

In the 1965/66 season, the adaptation of *Anne of Green Gables* reached first place on the list of the most popular foreign plays staged in Poland. It would repeat its success several times in the seasons 1970/71, 1971/72, 1975/76, 1977/78. In the 1979/80 season it dropped to the second position, after *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Wasserman's adaptation of the novel by Ken Kesey.



Elzbieta Jasińska

Anne has set the record for the longest continuous run of any show in Poland. In the Classical Theatre in Warsaw it was on for five years; in the Stefan Jaracz Theatre in Łódź for thirteen years; and in the Popular Theatre in Warsaw where it opened in 1974, it has entered its twelfth year.

In fact, in the period between 1963 and 1980 *Anne of Green Gables* reached 5,264 performances with a total attendance of 2,219,039!

In March 1964, when *Anne* enjoyed its early theatrical success, Polish Radio took an interest in the novel by LMM. An outstanding Polish radio personality, Wanda Tatarkieicz-Małkowska, directed a radio play in which the title role was performed by the unforgettable Anne from the 1958 TV production — Danuta Przesmycka. In 1969 listeners could again meet Anne on the air: the novel was read by Irena Kwiatkowska, one of the greatest Polish comic actresses. Then, in 1979, the whole series of radio plays based on the novels was broadcast and the response of the audience became an important contribution to the ever-increasing popularity of LMM in Poland. A young graduate from the Department of Polish Language of the



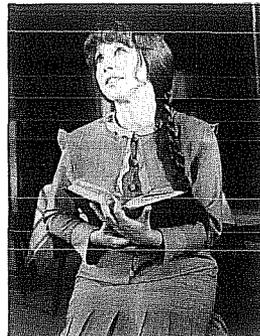
Mirostawa Lombardo



Anna Cellan



Ewa Adamaska as "Anne"
(1973)



Alicja Kobielska as "Anne"
(1975)



Joanna Lissner as "Anne"
(1983-4)

Warsaw University, Emilia (she was named after LMM's heroine) Stawska, prepared a radio serial in eighteen episodes adapting the following novels: *Anne of Green Gables*, *Anne of Avonlea*, *Anne of the Island*, *Anne's House of Dreams*, and fragments of *Anne of Windy Poplars*. The serial, broadcast between December 2, 1979, and July 6, 1980, was repeated in 1983. It was directed by Maja Wachowiak. Once a popular actress who performed great roles in dozens of movies, after having graduated from the Film and Theatre Academy in Warsaw, Wachowiak had become a director. In *Anne of Green Gables* the role of Anne was played by eleven-year-old Monika Bezak and in the later parts by the popular young actress Anna Romantowska. The



Miroslaw Konarowski reading Gilbert's part on Polish Radio (1979-83)

part of Marilla was performed by the famous actress Zofia Ryś, and Matthew was played by Franciszek Pieczka, an actor extremely popular because of his appearances in TV serials. The part of Gilbert was performed by Mirosław Konarowski who became a star after he had appeared in the movie *The Arsenal Action* as "Zośka", the legendary commander of the scouts during the Second

World War whose story was told in *Stoning the Barricades* by Aleksander Kamiński. In 1980 Emilia Stawska (the adapter), Maja Wachowiak (the director), Piotr Moss (the composer) and Anna Romantowska (the performer of the title role) were awarded the Prize of the Radio and Television Committee. In a TV interview they told me:

Maja Wachowiak: "This is a book about kind-heartedness. Sincerity, truth, simplicity can really exist and at times even be triumphant."

Anna Romantowska: "It would be so good to maintain such freshness, innocence, admiration of the world, to have such faith and such dreams."

Emilia Stawska: "Anne is not sentimental or sweet. She only escapes to romanticism – this is her defence against the world. She is strong, she is aware of her choices."

For the producer the greatest prize was a massive mail from the listeners. The letters proved that Polish teenagers still related to *Anne of Green Gables*.

After the radio broadcast of the *Anne* serial, Polish Radio was snowed under by letters from all over Poland, from big cities, small towns, and from desolated villages. The letters were written by the poor and the rich. The youngest author was seven-years-old, the oldest – 90.

Zofia Kozłowska, a music teacher from Opole: "I was brought up on books such as *Anne*. They were lost during the war. But I still keep in my heart their memories

and with them I will die I am not ashamed of such big words though I am an old woman.”

Anne Rogala from Poniatowa: “I have turned 17, I love books and I read a lot but I’ve always been certain of one thing. I’ve loved that red-haired girl with starry eyes. After having read a few pages I regain strength and dignity. Anne is my greatest friend, she helps me so much.”

Ludmiła Grabowska from Warsaw: “I was moved to tears and overwhelmed with joy when I listened to *Anne of Green Gables* — the book of my childhood. How many pedagogical values it possesses. It encourages the young to study, to be diligent, kind to people, to feel respect for elders (which is so rare today), to love nature! I beg you to continue that serial which brings joy to everybody whose life is very hard and sad.”

Some listeners told their own stories:

“I read the first Anne book as a young bride. I got this book at Christmas, the first Christmas I spent together with my husband — my ‘Gilbert’. He dedicated it ‘Anne for Anne’ because that is my name. The year was 1913, just before the First World War. An orphan child living in poverty, I had at least my own home, my Green Gables. Then we were sent into exile — to Siberia. My grandfather had fought in the January Insurrection (1863); we were a family suspected in taking part in the underground independence movement. I took with me only the most precious things: the photographs of my dead parents, *Pan Tademusz* by Adam Mickiewicz, and *Anne!* After five years of poverty, hunger and exile we returned to Poland, to free Poland! I had a small child, my daughter. She was born and raised in exile and when asked who she was she always answered: ‘I’m Ania Krystek. I’m Polish.’ I named her after the girl created by LMM, praying: ‘May she be like Anne — brave, wise, good-hearted, and sensitive’. That last quality she did not possess, and perhaps this was fortunate. Thanks to her tough and stubborn nature, inherited from her father, she survived through the Second World War taking an active part in the underground. Her brother, on the other hand, was a dreamer such as Walter. He was my only son. He died in 1944 at the age of 21. He was shot by Germans 24 hours after his wedding. Well, at least I have his grave. Anne was deprived even of that when Walter was shot, killed by the same enemy. My dear! In July 1979 I celebrated my 90th birthday. I’ve known every bitter and tragic experience. But there is no sorrow in me and I do not blame anybody. I have a lot of good, close young friends. Together we listen to the adventures of Anne of Green Gables. We dwell in the garden of her childhood, we hope that children — Polish, as well as Canadian — will grow up under these trees — safely.”

(Here I must confess. The author of this letter is the greatest love of my life — the mother of my mother, my Granny Anne.)

The letters were extraordinary and heart-rending. The bulk of the mail was composed of the letters written by young girls fourteen to twenty years of age. Many of the letters said, “Anne — that’s me!”:

Anne no. 2, age 23, from Toruń: “My name is Anne. I’m freckled and red-haired.

Unfortunately, I'm not 'terribly skinny' as Mrs. Lynde said about Anne. Like the heroine of the novel I suffered a lot because of that. To tell you the truth I have not dyed my hair green but I poured a pint of peroxide on it. Thanks to my hair, or rather to its colour, I met my future husband. Now I am Anne at the University. I'm a history student. And even now, when I'm already grown-up, when my low days come I reach for my favourite novel."

Dorota Hawro, age 18, from Gliwice: "Since the time I 'made friends' with Anne I've dreamed of being like her. I've searched for psychological and physical features in me that would resemble Anne's. I was so happy when I found a few: vivid imagination, a gift of gaining people's hearts, 'reticence', etc. I also wanted to have red hair and, following the advice of my friends, I drank a sea of carrot juice which did not help much but I discovered seven freckles on my nose which cheered me up greatly."

Wiesława Hundt, age 20, from Gniezno: "I was called Carrots at school. I've cried a sea of tears. I knew so well what Anne experienced because of her hair. She was so close to me I almost identified with her. Thanks to Anne I have not become a hermit. I owe her so much: trust in people, stubbornness, steadfastness."

Others said, "Anne's part of my family":

Apolonia Kiw from Busko Zdrój: "I am 35-years-old and I come back to this book at least once a year when I am down and out. After every episode of the radio play we had the feeling as if we had just said good-bye to a very close friend. Because Anne belongs to our home. We have a twelve-year-old daughter, Anna; we would like her to resemble Anne of Green Gables."

"There are various books. Some we read at one sitting, others we savour. *Anne* belongs to that second category; it's written with beautiful, subtle style. I laughed through tears, delighted and enchanted by the story.... I followed Anne's adventures since the first episode had been broadcast, together with Mummy and my younger brothers and sisters."

Elżbieta M. from Biała Podlaska: "Anne has always been so dear to me, so dear.... During my entrance exam to high school I wrote about her in a composition 'What literary hero are you attracted to the most?' Although *Anne* was not included in the obligatory reading list, my composition received the best mark. During my studies at the university I came back to *Anne*. There are not many books about kind-heartedness, friendship, good people. That is why I think that such books always have their faithful admirers. My daughters are still babies but in a few years' time I'll give them *Anne of Green Gables* and together with them I'll enjoy meeting her. May they be like Anne!"

Elżbieta Kazanowska, a fifteen-year-old from Kock: "My Mummy was making cake while listening to *Anne* and she got so involved that she forgot to add yeast which had never happened to her before. She had not read the book. In the story of Anne — homeless in her wandering — she found the image of her own life. She had been a drudge, she couldn't go to school. Now she has eight children and she is a wonderful mother. And to me Anne is dear because I'm a dreamer, I love beauty and poetry, I'd like to become a teacher like she was — so that my pupils would trust me and be

my friends.”

And there were other approaches:

Grażyna Żuber from Cracow: “I’m 22. I am a student of pedagogy. When I’m a teacher I’d like to meet kids with Anne’s sensitivity.”

And Małgorzata Łaczynska, eighteen-years-old, from Gdańsk: “In fact I’ve never had any friends, I broke the conventions of my schoolmates, my interests are quite different from those of my friends; I love books, films and classical music. I’m called a bookworm and they avoid me but I don’t care too much. I like solitude though sometimes it lays a heavy burden on me. Then I come back to Anne and I try to be like her — to create in my imagination an ideal, beautiful, good world. I discover great friends. I’ve been captivated by Tonio Kröger [one of Mann’s heroes], Lord Jim who was always drifting towards light, Olga from *Three Sisters* by Chekhov.... But I always come back to my Anne from Prince Edward Island. Yet, since I am an inquisitive person, please, tell me on the air where the name PEI comes from. What Prince Edward is connected with it and for what great deeds was his name commemorated in one of the most beautiful spots in the world?”

Some commented on the relevance of *Anne* today:

Iwona Kalińska, fourteen-years-old, from Łódź: “Today there are cheerful girls, there are romantic girls but there are no girls who would understand everybody as Anne did. The person so sensitive to the beauty of the world is one in a thousand.”

Bożena Kajdar, sixteen-years-old, from Ogrodszaniec: “Anne found happiness in quiet family life. We can also find it, though for sure it is easier for those who share with Anne imagination, modesty, and confidence in people. Perhaps it sounds impossible but if in any school there were at least one girl resembling Anne and if later on she became a brave woman like Anne, many people in the world would feel better. But maybe I’m wrong? Maybe nowadays we need a different Anne?”

Krystian B., 24-years-old, from Gorzów Wielkopolski: “Anne is a rum [“really super”] girl. She has a unique personality which arouses irritation, anger, and laughter among mediocre people. People who are different from others, even those who dress differently, are always ridiculed. A man smiling in the street causes an instinctive animosity, not to mention more serious problems — outstanding people destroyed by pipsqueaks. Anne is triumphant. But it can only happen on PEI, the PEI of Lucy Maud Montgomery’s imagination.”

The young people’s responses were broadcast after the last episode of *Anne*. The prevailing opinion was that there are no girls like Anne today because everybody hides behind masks of cynicism or egoism. Why do our Polish teenagers have such a gloomy view of the world?... No one wanted to transfer Anne just as she was, straight from the early 20th century into today’s reality; however, all agreed that the universal qualities the writer endowed her with would certainly be of great value nowadays.

Young men also wrote about Anne:

W.Z., from Silesia: "...Many young boys and young men while listening to the radio dreamed about meeting a girl who would resemble Anne (a little bit, at least)... I'm not going to get married unless I meet a girl like Anne."

Ichtiander Żukowski from Zgorzelec: "Anne Shirley! You came into my life twice — once when I was an adolescent boy and now when I am a mature man. When I tried to find a girl-friend I always looked for someone like you. I did my best to be somebody like Gilbert to my girl-friends as I was convinced that we were shaped by those who love us."

S.P. from Mokobody: "I think I am not your regular kind of listener. I'm already in my mid-forties. Like Anne I dreamed of wonderful love and home. Alas, I wasted my young years. My life is sad. I'd like so much to protect children, all children, from such a life. After I had listened to the serial I started to believe that I could love someone else's children as if they had been my own. I dreamed about organizing a home for orphan children. I know there are such homes in Poland. But single men cannot be in charge of them. So, my dear Anne, such a home will remain in my dreams."

This last letter came from a small settlement lying close to my native village in Podlasie. When analyzing on radio the letters about *Anne* I quoted this fragment. And in autumn 1983 I received a letter:

Dear Madam: Three and a half years ago I wrote to Polish Radio that after I had listened to Anne Shirley's story I became convinced that I would still be able to love.... You liked and broadcast my words. If I had known what my words together with your comments would mean to a certain girl, I would have gone mad out of happiness. It would take the whole night to describe the whole story. So I'd like to thank you very, very much and to let you know that I expect the happy end to come in January 1984. Maybe you'll want to come to our wedding and see a happy family who'll try to make others happy. Sławomir Popowski."

Life becomes like a romantic page from Lucy Maud Montgomery's novel! Some four years before the success of *Anne* as a radio serial, I had begun work on another of L.M. Montgomery's novels. In 1976 I was preparing an adaptation of *The Blue Castle* for television.

There was a small second-hand bookshop in Warsaw, the private enterprise of an old wizened fellow. What characterized him was that he was reluctant to sell books. He could not part with them. Having got used to the fact that people always ransacked his treasures, and knowing that I had been looking for all L.M. Montgomery's editions, one day he mysteriously announced that he had a great surprise for me. He had unbound, loose sheets of *The Blue Castle* translated by an unknown person, with the year of publication missing. The name of the bookshop owner appeared as the publisher of the book: J. Kubicki, 27A Hoża Street. The translation

was by a Karol Bobrzynowski.

When I was preparing my adaptation of *The Blue Castle* for TV, I did everything I could to search out this translator, with no results. Mr. Kubicki — who, as it turned out, had been the owner of a small publishing house before the war — when nagged, badgered and pestered by me, at last told me the story of the translator of *The Blue Castle*. Mr. Karol Bobrzynowski was a girl. She was a Jew. She was beautiful, young, and talented. During the German occupation she had been hidden by a Polish family. The young woman was doomed to total isolation — for if her hiding had been discovered by the Germans both she and her Polish guardians would have been sentenced to death — and she desperately looked for any “psychological” help. She found it in a novel which in its English version, together with other Montgomery books, belonged to those who rescued her. Her translation of *The Blue Castle* was bought during the war by Mr. Kubicki who hoped to publish it and, I suppose, wanted to provide financial help to the translator. When he returned to Warsaw after the uprising, the city lay in ruins. The image of Kansas City presented in a famous American film *The Day After* would seem wonderful and idyllic in comparison with Warsaw in 1945. By a miracle Mr. Kubicki dug up from his cellar a slightly damaged manuscript. He hoped to reopen his firm; but he only managed to print the book in 1947. He did not have time to publish and distribute it. His publishing house was closed. Only many years later did he learn who the mysterious Karol Bóbrzynowski was. Did the girl survive the inferno of the uprising? We do not know. Probably we will never know who she was and what her real name was. She left only the pages of a delightful translation in which (following other translators of the *Anne* books — Rachela Bernstein and Janina Zawisza-Krasucka) she changed the names of the protagonists so that they would sound more familiar to a Polish ear. Valancy became Joanna and Barney became Edward (Eddie). Valancy’s nickname “Doss”, coined by the ghastly clan, which has no funny meaning in Polish, was changed to “Buba”.

The show *The Blue Castle* broadcast on Polish TV in 1976 (directed by Andrzej Żmijewski with Ewa Żukowska and Marek Bargiełowski playing the main parts) was repeated on demand of the viewers. In July 1978 *The Blue Castle* had its première in the Theatre of the Łódź District in Łódź and in June 1979 the first performance of the musical *The Blue Castle* took place in the Musical Theatre in Wrocław. One person fascinated with *The Blue Castle* was Barbara Kostrzewska, the artistic director of the theatre and formerly a star of the opera.

I remember my own first visit to this opera-house. My parents took me there in 1948. The rubble of Warsaw did not smoke any more as it had in 1945, but we walked on the paths beaten in the ruins. On the rubble, typical Warsaw flower girls settled themselves, holding baskets of wild

carnations. People hurrying to the theatre were stopping to buy the fragrant bouquets. I was perplexed. In my faraway village we had taken flowers to church. Perhaps one should take them to the theatre, as well? When Barbara Kostrzewska appeared on the stage, in a white crinoline which made her resemble an unusual flower, from all sides the bouquets of flowers flew to her like butterflies. In her — the unforgettable Rosina from *The Barber of Seville*, Mimi from *The Bohemian Girl*, Violetta from *La traviata* and Halka from the opera of the greatest Polish composer Stanisław Moniuszko — Warsaw greeted a victorious comeback of song. Warsaw greeted a great artist, a great singer, and a brave soldier of the Underground Army. Warsaw greeted her who had been imprisoned and persecuted!

When on the 40th anniversary of her artistic career Barbara Kostrzewska received a proposal to direct *The Gipsy Baron* (in Polish *Baron Cygański*) in Cracow Opera House, she said that of all musical plays with titles beginning with “B” she was interested only in *The Blue Castle* (*Blekitny Zamek*). Thus on December 18, 1982, the first performance of the musical took place in Cracow. Since October 1982 it has also been on the stage of the Musical Theatre in Szczecin.

My adaptation made some small changes from the original version. I removed the figure of the mother — thus endowing Aunt Telka (Cousin



Far left: Roman Czuby, composer; Barbara Kostrzewska (in white fur); Józef Napiórkowski and Barbara Wachowicz (on far right). Cracow Premiere of *The blue castle*.

Stickles) with all the vices. In the mentality of Polish people, a mother is so sacred that showing her as a shrew, deprived of any feelings, would constitute a sacrilege. I also decided against presenting the story of Cissy (Cesia). In the Polish musical version of *The Blue Castle*, there are three great ballet scenes and two of them are closely connected with the original. The first one is a ball in the Blue Castle of the heroine's dreams, where a solo dancer, surrounded by handsome boys, appears as an alter ego of Valancy. The second one is a dance in a rural community. The third scene — Midsummer Night — on the other hand, reflects a typical Polish custom. On St. John's night (June 24th) Polish girls and boys go to the forest to find an enchanted fern flower which brings happiness. This is the night of fulfilled love.



"The terrible family and Abel"
(Szczecin)

The reviewers and critics responded favourably to the Wrocław show:

"...This is a romantic musical story full of charm, lyrical beauty, and sparkling humour." Wojciech Dzieduszycki, *Odra* magazine, 1980, No. 5.

"It was a unique performance. The stage was flooded with flowers. The audience gave the artists a standing ovation." *Gazeta Robotnicza*, Wrocław, June 20, 1979.



"A dance in a rural community" (Cracow)



"Joanna and Eddie" (Wrocław)



"St. John's Night Ballet" (Cracow)



"Joanna being urged to marry Mr. Schulz" (Wrocław)

"Barbara Wachowicz — beautiful, full of charm, a well-known writer — wrote a perfectly well-balanced dramatic libretto. It is based on the old novel of the genre once known as romance, written by the famous Canadian writer, Lucy Maud Montgomery. Nice melodies composed by Roman Czuby are hummed by the spectators after the show. The Blue Castle has the chance of becoming a hit of the season and not only on the Polish stages." Jerzy Waldorff, Poland's most severe musical critic, "Wzruszenia melancholijne", the Polityka magazine, 1979, No. 24.



"Joanna showing off her wedding ring" (Cracow)

The Cracow show:

"...The audience received The Blue Castle with unusual enthusiasm....The Blue Castle — a story about man's quest for a happy home — is good literature, and in the libretto the sentimental and lyrical scenes are interwoven with the farcical episodes raising storms of laughter....Despite the primitive conditions of our theatre building, frequent changes of scenery took place smoothly and unobtrusively, and beautiful costumes designed by Józef Napiórkowski contributed to the charm of the performance.

In the final scene the blue/white costumes are really delightful. It will remain the secret of the designer where, in these hard years, he secures such fabrics, appliqués and laces. I expect this musical to have a long run in this theatre." Anna Woźniakowska, "Zachwygam się Błękitnym Zamkiem" — "I am delighted with The Blue Castle", Dziennik Polski, December 27, 1982.



"First Christmas in the home of their dreams" (Cracow)

"A good time for dreams has come. Maybe this is the reason why The Blue Castle has been such a tremendous success. However — is there a wrong time for dreams? In the production directed by a famous opera star, Barbara Kostrzewska, the songs are well arranged and the stage logically designed.

There are also many interesting appearances of the actors. The 'horrible clan' is funny, the lyrical lover is full of charm, Joanna [Valancy] — ugly and poor and then flourishing in happiness and

love — is moving...” Małgorzata Komorowska, the *Teatr* magazine No. 7, 1983.

“The Blue Castle, the musical by Roman Czubaty and Barbara Wachowicz based on the novel by Lucy Maud Montgomery became a big hit. People have been queuing up for the tickets since 7 a.m.” Anna Nastulanka, “Bezdomny teatr”, the *Scena* magazine 1983, No. 4.

At the hundredth performance the audience sang the songs together with the actors. We organized an impromptu opinion poll: a group of medical students watched the show for the fourth time; a lady sitting behind me, an architect — for the ninth time! A young couple (she a nurse and he a metallurgist) — for the fifth time.



Final chorus of The blue castle (Cracow)

In the spring of 1983, a student of pedagogy from Szczecin wrote me: “Anne is universal and very dear but Valancy from *The Blue Castle* is also my bosom friend, representing every girl’s longings. Where is the Blue Castle? I also dream about it...”

My own English-language copy of *The Blue Castle* was sent me by Andrzej Busza, a professor at the University of British Columbia, where he is known as “a Conradian”. Having learnt about the unfailing popularity of L.M. Montgomery in Poland he wrote musingly:

Strange is the lot of books wandering from one country to another. Some of them,

buried for a long time in their native countries, flourish beyond the hills, finding their "life-giving" waters there, much to the delight of many generations. It seems likely that books most deeply rooted in the national background, permeated with the hues and scents of the native land, easily appeal to the reader living under an alien sky.

When I was working on this essay about the unfailing popularity of Lucy Maud Montgomery in Poland the telephone rang. Yes, right away, I could write a commentary for the exhibition catalogue of the artist and famous Polish theatrical designer, Andrzej Majewski. I found Majewski, a young and slim man, in a studio scattered with designs and pictures. They were ominous, dreary, yet fascinating. The recurring motif was Nike swathed with bandages. The white Nike. The Nike stretching the stumps of her broken wings. During the 1939 blitz on Warsaw, he saw a dust-covered woman, rushing to the gate with a scream. Majewski was three-years-old when his father was killed, five when his mother was arrested. His granny read him the fairy tales of Andersen, and a story about a girl who was an orphan, but to whom good fortune offered a home at Green Gables.

Instead of sophisticated discussions about his artistic works, Andrzej and I imagined ourselves visiting PEI. Finally, I coaxed from him *Anne of Windy Poplars* for three days. I took it from a shelf which held seven of the *Anne* books which had been published in Poland.

Returning home that day, I found a letter with ten Polish and Canadian seals. And it was not my imagination. It was true. The letter was from Avonlea. From Cavendish on PEI. Its senders were Poles, Janine and Lech Zieliński. Having learnt from my Canadian friends that I wanted to write

a book on Lucy Maud Montgomery and Prince Edward Island, they expressed their hopes that they would someday entertain me in their house on Cavendish Beach. The home is called "Biały orzeł", "The White Eagle" (the Polish national emblem). Thus, my personal story comes full circle, as the "global village" shrinks. The works of L.M. Montgomery reveal a secret victory over passing time, a secret which makes all boundaries disappear, which overcomes distances between generations and nationalities.



Barbara Wachowicz, Summer, 1983, Warsaw, Poland

Barbara Wachowicz graduated from the Department of Journalism at Warsaw University and subsequently completed studies on the history and theory of film at the State Film Academy in Łódź. She has published essays on the history of film art, and has done interviews with film stars like Kirk Douglas, Peter