

“Tennyson Would Never Approve”: Reading and Performance in Kevin Sullivan’s *Anne of Green Gables*

• Eleanor Hersey •

Résumé: Selon Eleanor Hersey, l’adaptation télévisée d’*Anne...la Maison aux pignons verts* de 1985 met l’accent sur l’identité de l’héroïne en tant que lectrice. La multiplication des scènes où, seule ou en public, Anne Shirley s’adonne à la lecture fait valoir deux aspects essentiels de la populaire série : si le personnage, grâce aux livres, forge son identité, lire, en revanche, devient pour les téléspectateurs un plaisir qui remet paradoxalement en cause le caractère frivole des lectures dites féminines.

Summary: This paper argues that Kevin Sullivan’s 1985 made-for-television miniseries version of L.M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* departs from the novel in sophisticated and compelling ways to focus on Anne Shirley’s identity as a reader. The multiple images of Anne reading in solitude and in public dramatize her intellectual development and encourage viewers to take pleasure in reading while challenging the view that women’s reading is frivolous or merely escapist. Interviews with Sullivan and with screenwriter Joe Wiesenfeld reveal their approach to Montgomery’s novel and their desire to appeal simultaneously to new and old readers of Montgomery’s fiction. As well, close readings of the miniseries emphasize its engagement with texts ranging from Alfred Tennyson’s poems to Alfred Noyes’s “The Highwayman.”

L.M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables*, the story of an eleven-year-old orphan adopted and raised by elderly guardians in a small town in Prince Edward Island, has been read by millions of fans since its publication in 1908. In 1985, Kevin Sullivan’s four-hour miniseries for television based on the novel attracted viewers around the world whose fan letters to Sullivan inspired the sequels *Anne of Green Gables: The Sequel* (1987) and *Anne of Green Gables: The Continuing Story* (2000). These miniseries have

not received the attention that critics have given to the novel in the last two decades, when popular books "for girls" have been re-evaluated from academic feminist perspectives. Yet in adapting the novel for the small screen, Sullivan and screenwriter Joe Wiesenfeld made changes to Montgomery's source text that reflect a central concern of 1980s feminist movements: that women's reading is emblematic of their right to pursue pleasures, educations, and careers separate from the responsibilities of housework and childcare. The miniseries introduces Anne Shirley to viewers as a domestic servant who consoles herself by reciting Alfred Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" and focuses on her ongoing struggle to defend her private reading and to earn her community's respect through public performances of literary works, thus strengthening the role of reading in Montgomery's novel in ways that dramatize the heroine's intellectual development and challenge the stereotypes that women's reading is selfish, addictive, and dangerous.

While most literary critics have considered the miniseries to be inferior to the novel, I will emphasize its unique value for viewers and its original contribution to Montgomery studies. This paper will include comparative readings between the novel and the miniseries as well as readings of the miniseries on its own terms with emphasis on the stated intentions of the filmmakers and the details of filmed art. I will focus on four scenes about reading in which the filmmakers emphasize Anne's intellectual growth and strengthen the connection between academic rivalry and romance made by Montgomery in the novel. Rather than neglecting or ignoring these central concerns of the novel, I will suggest, the filmmakers focus on their relevance to contemporary women.

In separate interviews with me, Sullivan and Wiesenfeld described their strong interest in Anne Shirley's personal and intellectual development. Sullivan characterized Anne as "a tremendously insecure character" who is still very powerful:

As an orphan, she has had in her early stages of development very little love and affection and only hardship and abuse, to a certain extent. Montgomery is very light on that, but between the lines you can certainly see it.... When she comes to the world of Green Gables and Avonlea, she essentially changes people's perspectives not only on her but on the world in general, and that's a very powerful ability and emotion, but it's still very much forged out of insecurity, and that's why Anne is so appealing, why we see parts of ourselves in Anne.

Wiesenfeld, who extensively rewrote Sullivan's original script at the request of some of the partners involved in the production,¹ described Anne's character as central to the novel's appeal:

What made it a joy to work on was that...the characterization of Anne was already in the Montgomery text (not always the case in source material).

So my contribution was to focus on dramatic coherence in recreating the work in the mouths of living actors, and to achieve a complexity of tone and color, in terms of using comedy, suspense, romance and strong emotional and dramatic identification, to tell the story in the television medium. (Letter, 15 Sept. 2000)

According to both filmmakers, the development of Anne's romantic feelings for her friend Gilbert Blythe was important but not central to the miniseries. Sullivan claimed that he was "focused on Anne's character" and on "telling the story from Anne's perspective," so that Gilbert's development was less important. Wiesenfeld also claimed that his focus was on Anne's character and listed "romance" as only one element of the "complexity of tone and color" that characterizes his television adaptation. This approach retains the novel's emphasis on the heroine as well as the compelling presence of Gilbert as her primary rival and devoted friend.

Yet literary critics have faulted the filmmakers for focusing on Anne's romance rather than her intellectual, emotional, and spiritual coming-of-age. In "'Too Much Love-making': *Anne of Green Gables* on Television" (1987), Susan Drain argues that "the film, by concentrating on the love story, is in some ways more old-fashioned, or even narrower, than the book. The film is an exquisite romance, but the novel is a *Bildungsroman*. That reduction is, finally, a loss" (72). In *A Life and Its Mirrors: A Feminist Reading of L.M. Montgomery's Fiction* (1991), Gabriella Åhmansson claims that the filmmakers have "effectively ruined" this adaptation by viewing Anne simply as Gilbert's future wife; drawing on Rachel Blau DuPlessis's *Writing Beyond the Ending* (1985), Åhmansson argues that filmmakers and critics should focus on Anne's *bildung* or individual growth rather than her romance (71-73). K.L. Poe and Helen Siourbas reiterated this critique of the miniseries at the international conference on L.M. Montgomery and Popular Culture held at the University of Prince Edward Island in 2000, arguing that the adaptation reduces Montgomery's female *bildungsroman* to a conservative romance plot.

These critics represent the superiority of the novel over the miniseries as a generic superiority, one that posits that the female *bildungsroman* is more complex, sophisticated, and empowering to women than the romance. I would argue that the romance plot in the novel and the focus on Anne's personal development in the miniseries challenge such a strong generic distinction—neither novel nor film is purely *bildungsroman* nor purely romance. I would argue further that critics who denigrate the elements of romance in both versions also fail to consider feminist theories about the romance genre's complexity and its potential to empower women by articulating forms of resistance to patriarchy. Sullivan claims that Montgomery created Gilbert to be Anne's "intellectual equal." While the novel represents intellectual equality as a romantic ideal for its Victorian heroine, the miniseries addresses the tensions between romantic love, education, and professional work that concerned millions of women viewers in the 1980s.

Sullivan's miniseries can be read as a popular expression of academic feminist theories about the repression of women's reading within patriarchal societies that demand women's constant attention to the nurturing of others. In *The Woman Reader: 1837-1914* (1993), Kate Flint argues that women readers were threatening to Victorian and Edwardian cultures due to the readers' total absorption, their deafness and blindness to their immediate environments, the autonomy of their minds, and their sensual and erotic engagement with books (4). Flint emphasizes the distinction between women's actual reading practices and popular fears about women's reading but suggests that many women were constrained by societies that distrusted their solitude, mental activity, and sensual pleasure. In *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (1984), Nina Baym argues that fears about women's reading also abounded in nineteenth-century America, where adult women readers were encouraged to prefer chaste, delicate books (53). These studies provide a context for Montgomery's novel, in which characters like Marilla Cuthbert, Mrs. Allan, and Miss Stacy see Anne's passionate reading as a threat to her development as a self-sacrificing, domestic, chaste, and disciplined Victorian woman.

Studies of women's reading in the 1980s and 1990s suggest that twentieth-century women still felt guilty about reading for pleasure. In *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1991), Janice A. Radway describes interviews with women who worry that their reading is selfish, escapist, and even addictive: "Their doubts are often cultivated into a full-grown feeling of guilt by husbands and children who object to this activity because it draws the women's attention away from the immediate family circle" (90). In "Readers Reading L.M. Montgomery" (1994), Catherine Sheldrick Ross describes the same feelings of guilt among readers whom she interviewed in the 1990s. Many women claim to read and reread Montgomery's books because they affirm female voices, imaginations, and spaces. "However, since time spent with Anne as a friend is time not spent with flesh-and-blood friends, some readers acknowledged that reading was partly a guilty pleasure. To express their ambivalence, they used terms such as 'escape,' 'compulsion,' and 'addiction' and sometimes reported parental disapproval of their childhood reading" (32). It is not surprising that so many readers embraced the miniseries version of *Anne of Green Gables*: as I will demonstrate below, the series addresses women's ambivalence about reading with constant affirmations of its value.

Though many literary critics fear that film and television adaptations will lure potential readers away from their source novels, the Sullivan miniseries inspired the critic Temma F. Berg to return to Montgomery's work with an adult feminist perspective. In "*Anne of Green Gables: A Girl's Reading*" (1988), Berg describes her reaction to the miniseries:

The TV series seemed more feminist than the novel I remembered. I didn't

remember the women in the novel as quite so powerful as the women in the TV show, or Marilla as quite so warm-hearted under her gruff exterior. And I didn't remember the strong-willed woman school teacher at all. Were these and other manifestations of feminist thought I noticed in the TV series...present in the novel or simply the addition of a modern screenwriter's sensibility? And, if they were in the novel, why had I not remembered them? What was the significance of that forgetting? (125)

Berg shares the concerns expressed by other critics about Gilbert's increased role in the film as a romantic partner for Anne (127), but she appreciates the feminist elements such as the strong woman teacher and the value placed on formal education for women. Berg suggests that Anne's decision to discipline her reading is central to the feminism of both novel and film: "Actually what Anne learns — to be a resisting reader — is the basic lesson of feminist criticism, for women readers need to be especially cautious as they assimilate and project the images that fiction gives them" (126). The miniseries inspired Berg to reflect on how much her childhood reading had shaped her life and to recognize the significance of women's reading to feminist theory.

Both Sullivan and Wiesenfeld addressed the film to Montgomery's readers in the hope of strengthening their love for the books. Sullivan claimed that "my goal at the end of the day was that if you watched this film...and you were familiar with the novel, you would have felt as though you were watching the book in its truest form." Wiesenfeld agreed: "From the beginning, we saw the audience for the film as being the same as the audience for the book. Primarily young women and girls, mature women who remembered the book fondly from their youth." Rather than attempting to reproduce or replace the novel, these filmmakers made their adaptation a commentary on the value of reading itself: Anne's private, passionate reading in the early scenes of the miniseries may inspire viewers to return to Montgomery's novels, while her public performances of literary works demonstrate the value of television adaptation as a shared community event.

The miniseries begins with a shot of Anne Shirley walking alone through the trees, wearing ragged clothes and carrying a large basket and milk pail, passionately reading aloud from Alfred Tennyson's poem "The Lady of Shalott":

Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver
Through the wave that runs for ever
By the island in the river
 Flowing down to Camelot. (1: 389)

The title *Anne of Green Gables* appears on the screen and the camera cuts to Anne's face as she gazes over the landscape, clearly so absorbed in the world of Camelot that she has forgotten her situation as an orphan and servant to

the Hammond family. She reaches the lines "And little other care hath she, / The Lady of Shalott" (1: 390) before Mrs. Hammond yells her name and breaks her reverie. When Mrs. Hammond discovers that Anne has been reading, she throws the book into the kitchen stove: "And if I catch you readin' any more o' them books o' yours while you're supposed to be lookin' after my youngins, they'll feed the fire too, missy." Anne goes to deliver lunch to Mr. Hammond and finds him dead of a heart attack that she believes was provoked by his anger about her tardiness, and she is forced to go back to the dreaded orphanage.

The beginning of the miniseries affirms the value of women's reading as an act of independence and of well-deserved pleasure, even when the books that are available contain very limited and idealized images of women. Moreover, this opening sequence immediately establishes Anne's point of view as central to the miniseries: through her hushed voice and the shots of her face, we enter the secret world of her imagination. Our sympathy grows when Mrs. Hammond calls her "poor miserable trash that don't deserve no better" and when Anne consoles herself by speaking to her own reflection in the mirror. Joe Wiesenfeld claims that his motivations for inventing this opening sequence were "straightforward":

Sympathy and audience identification with the protagonist from the very beginning; high conflict from the very beginning, clearly understood motivation for the character in her desire to remain where she wasn't wanted once she got to Green Gables. The reading of the poem was my way of creating a counter tone, which demonstrated her rich inner life that sustained her in the daily event of the exploitation and abuse she had to suffer, without having her moan and groan about her lot in life. (Letter, 15 Sept. 2000)

Wiesenfeld could have created sympathy and high conflict by developing any of Anne's references to her childhood in the novel, including the drunken husband of an adoptive family who smashed bookcases and was killed by falling under a train. This scene in which Anne's reading leads to the death of an adoptive father introduces reading as a form of resistance to the "exploitation and abuse" that women often suffer, with the power to disrupt traditional domestic roles completely. Anne's reading may be punished by her return to the orphanage, but it leads eventually to her adoption by a relatively sympathetic family.

While the filmmakers employ several effective methods of representing a character's point of view in film (point-of-view shots, a monologue, and close-ups of the actor's facial expressions), the beginning of the novel does not contain techniques such as free indirect discourse, dialogue, or descriptions of Anne's thoughts in order to emphasize her perspective. The opening chapters of the novel focus on members of the Avonlea community as they react to Anne's arrival. The first chapter, "Mrs. Rachel Lynde Is Surprised,"

describes an Avonlea matriarch who watches Matthew Cuthbert drive to the station to meet the orphan whom he has adopted. We do not meet Anne until the second chapter, "Matthew Cuthbert Is Surprised," when the narrator describes her in objective terms: "A child of about eleven, garbed in a very short, very tight, very ugly dress of yellowish gray wincey" (11). Anne's point of view finally becomes prominent as she describes her impressions of the landscape in the following pages. I would argue against Drain's claim that the miniseries distances viewers from Anne, since "however sympathetic the camera, its eye settles on exteriors" (63); instead, I suggest that the opening shots of the miniseries compel viewers to identify with Anne's point of view more strongly than the opening chapters of the novel, in which the narrator lingers on Anne's exterior before revealing her thoughts.

The opening sequence of the miniseries expands on the fifth chapter of the novel, in which Anne briefly describes her work with Mrs. Hammond's eight children and her move to the orphanage after Mr. Hammond's death. The novel's narrator leaves the details to the imagination of both reader and characters: "What a starved, unloved life she had had — a life of drudgery and poverty and neglect; for Marilla was shrewd enough to read between the lines of Anne's history and divine the truth" (41). Wiesenfeld's opening scene dramatizes the hardship and abuse that the novel places "between the lines," demonstrating the ways in which a beautiful, nostalgic period film can represent the darker side of Victorian culture by critiquing its treatment of women, domestic servants, and orphans.

In an early review of the miniseries, Gillian Mackay claims that "the early scenes suggest the potential for Anne's escapism to degenerate into madness had she not been rescued by *Green Gables*" (78). Drain agrees: "The scenes where Anne talks to her own reflection are glimpses of something dangerously close to madness: she is living in a dream-world...and that dream-world must be shattered if the child is to be saved" (66). These critics interpret Anne's act of talking to an imaginary friend as madness, just as women's reading was associated with mental illness in the Victorian period (Flint 58). My interpretation of the miniseries emphasizes Anne's power to overcome her oppressive situation rather than her need to be "rescued" or "saved" from madness.

Anne's reading of "The Lady of Shalott" — a poem not mentioned in the novel — allows the filmmakers to demonstrate Anne's frustration with her class and gender status and to critique Tennyson's images of passive femininity. Flint claims that Tennyson's poems were recommended for Victorian young ladies since their angelic heroines were considered to be models of feminine virtue while the poetic language elevated the mind above material circumstances (76-79). Yet Montgomery's journal from 1909 suggests that at least one Victorian woman resisted Tennyson's gender politics:

I detest Tennyson's *Arthur*! If I'd been *Guinevere* I'd have been unfaithful to

him too. But not for *Lancelot* — he is just as unbearable in another way. As for *Geraint*, if I'd been *Enid* I'd have *bitten* him. These "patient Griseldas" of women deserve all they get!

Speaking to a friend once of Tennyson I said, "I *like* Tennyson because he gives me nothing but pleasure. I cannot *love* him because he gives me nothing but pleasure." (*Selected Journals* 1: 358)

Montgomery suggests that the best reading provides her with knowledge, insight, and power while it affirms her identity as a strong woman who remains independent from men. While the miniseries defends Anne's right to read, these scenes make it clear that Tennyson's poem cannot empower her in these ways because it does not recognize the history of women's oppression.

The filmmakers emphasize the contrast between Tennyson's Camelot and Anne's reality through the abrupt shift from Anne whispering "And little other care hath she, / The Lady of Shalott" to Mrs. Hammond screaming her name, the cut from Anne's face to Mrs. Hammond holding a screaming baby, and the end of the music on the soundtrack. When Anne spills some milk as she rushes into the kitchen, Mrs. Hammond reminds her that it "comes right out a my babies' mouths" and that "Mr. Hammond and the men been waitin' well nigh an hour for their lunch while you been dawdlin'." Anne's plea that "It was just so thrilling I couldn't put it down" connects her to the women of the late twentieth century whose reading "so engages their attention that it enables them to deny their physical presence in an environment associated with responsibilities that are acutely felt and occasionally experienced as too onerous to bear" (Radway 93). Since Anne is responsible for the care of eight children, it seems natural that she should be attracted to the world of Tennyson, where

Four gray walls, and four gray towers,
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle imbowers
The Lady of Shalott. (1: 389)

Anne's reading also enables her to assert her cultural superiority to the Hammonds and to maintain some independence from them. Anne's attraction to Tennyson and her claim that "I simply couldn't live here if I hadn't any imagination" suggest that she is a middle-class person trapped in a working-class environment because she is an orphan. Tennyson's poetry inspires her to distinguish herself from the people around her through the way that she speaks. Even Anne's address to her mirror reflection represents the comfort of this elevated language: "But if I hadn't lost myself in the beauty of the day, the only beauty which is vouchsafed me, poor Mr. Hammond might still be with us." Anne's use of language increases our sympathy for her when Mrs. Hammond calls her "poor miserable trash," just as it inspires

Marilla to trust her when she describes her past in the novel: "And there's nothing rude or slangy in what she does say. She's ladylike. It's likely her people were nice folks" (41). While Anne's reading distinguishes her from real "trash," the miniseries gains respectability by making its viewers into vicarious readers of Tennyson.

On a more subtle level, the miniseries critiques "The Lady of Shalott" as an idealized image of female domestic entrapment. Both Anne and Tennyson's heroine are trapped in small spaces, compelled to perform repetitive, mindless tasks, and faced with death if they try to escape. The stanzas that Anne reads at the beginning of the miniseries describe the castle where the Lady sits weaving and the curse that prevents her from looking out the window. The poem goes on to describe the mirror in which the Lady watches people below her tower, her increasing frustration with her confinement, her decision to risk everything in order to look directly at Sir Lancelot, her death, and the kind words that Lancelot speaks over her corpse. In a 1979 article, Ross connects the Lady of Shalott's mirror to Anne's habit of speaking to the mirror in Montgomery's novel. Ross argues that both heroines are trapped in a world of romance that "can be preserved only by being kept from contact with the real world, which sinks the barge, cracks the mirror, explodes the illusion" ("Calling Back" 45-46). The miniseries dramatizes this connection between the heroines by juxtaposing Anne's reading of "The Lady of Shalott" and her speech to her mirror reflection. Yet Tennyson's heroine is destined to die for love, while the miniseries critiques this all-too-familiar plot device by representing Anne as a survivor who will overcome the obstacles in her path and learn to value her education and her participation in a community of women.

The second half of the miniseries begins with Anne's first day of school with Miss Stacey (based on the novel's Miss Stacy), the teacher who becomes her close friend and mentor throughout Sullivan's *Anne of Green Gables* and *Anne of Green Gables: The Sequel*. Anne has lived in Avonlea for two years and has been learning to separate her love of dramatic storytelling and romantic fantasies from her domestic work. The credits for the episode appear over shots of Miss Stacey's innovative teaching methods, ending with a scene in which she discovers Anne reading Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1880) during geometry class. As in the beginning of the first episode, Anne is totally absorbed in her reading and oblivious to everything around her. When Miss Stacey takes the book away, Anne is jolted back into the classroom, the soft music ends, and the camera cuts to Miss Stacey's desk, where Anne is reprimanded for her deception and wasteful use of time. Details like the appearance of the book and Anne's facial expression reinforce the connection to the "Lady of Shalott" scene and invite viewers to identify with Anne as a reader whose pleasure is mixed with guilt for neglecting other duties. The filmmakers place this scene at the beginning of the episode to exploit a formal property of television series — their division into discrete

episodes that audiences view after gaps in time — in order to highlight a key event that could be overlooked by readers of the novel.

Anne is now a student rather than a domestic servant, but Miss Stacey suggests that her reading still violates the ideal feminine virtues of efficiency and honesty. "I'm disappointed in you, Anne. Reading novels during geometry class is a misuse of your time. Moreover, it's a deception." Anne's response evokes the Christian rhetoric of sin and forgiveness: "Can you ever forgive me, Miss Stacey? I promise I won't even look at *Ben-Hur* for a whole week as penance, not even to see how the chariot race turned out." As in the earlier scene, the act of reading independently rather than the text itself is threatening to young women's propriety; in this case, Anne has increased the deception by reading the novel inside an open textbook.

Yet Miss Stacey is far more sympathetic than Mrs. Hammond to Anne's reading, demanding self-discipline for the sake of Anne's education and future career rather than self-sacrifice for the sake of men and children. Miss Stacey is understanding rather than angry when she returns the book: "I'm returning this to you because I know I can trust you not to let it happen again. Oh, Anne, you know I want to encourage you to read literature, to develop your imagination. It's a precious gift. But not during geometry class." Mrs. Hammond burns the book of poems with the words "Oh, you darn well won't do it again," but Miss Stacey trusts Anne to control her own reading: "I know I can trust you not to let it happen again." When Miss Stacey encourages Anne to become more disciplined and self-aware, she makes it possible for Anne to challenge her community's stereotypes about women's reading rather than reinforcing them.

Anne's reading of the historical novel *Ben-Hur* reveals her ability to accommodate different writing styles and to identify with heroic soldiers as well as suicidal ladies, despite the nineteenth-century ideal that young women are attracted to delicate novels of domestic life. Like "The Lady of Shalott," *Ben-Hur* has an exotic setting in the distant past, heroes who fight in wars, heroines who are locked up in towers, and a tragic ending. Yet the novel focuses on the hero and addresses a learned and explicitly male audience, with more than five hundred pages of elaborate prose and a wealth of historical detail. The chariot race scene that Anne is reading when Miss Stacey confiscates the book exemplifies the narrator's address to a male reader who is attracted to the machismo of ancient Greco-Roman and Middle Eastern cultures:

Let the reader try to fancy it; let him first look down upon the arena, and see it glistening in its frame of dull-gray granite walls...let him see the drivers, erect and statuesque, undisturbed by the motion of the cars, their limbs naked, and fresh and ruddy with the healthful polish of the baths — in their right hands goads, suggestive of torture dreadful to the thought...let him see the fours...limbs slender, yet with impact crushing as hammers — every muscle of the rounded bodies instinct with glorious life, swelling,

diminishing, justifying the world in taking from them its ultimate measure of force...and, with such distinctness as this picture comes, he may share the satisfaction and deeper pleasure of those to whom it was a thrilling fact, not a feeble fancy. (366)

"The Lady of Shalott" allowed Anne to identify with a passive, powerless woman in a confining domestic situation, but *Ben-Hur* invites her to assume the identity of an active, powerful man who takes revenge on his enemies rather than submitting to them until the final subversive act of suicide.

Anne's reading of *Ben-Hur* has a less prominent place in Montgomery's novel, but it clearly demonstrates her rebellion against Victorian gender roles. In chapter 30, Anne confesses to Marilla that she was punished for reading the novel and mentions that "Jane Andrews lent it to me" (240), revealing that a community of young women privately exchanged this text that their parents and teacher would not authorize. Marilla remarks that "When I was a girl I wasn't so much as allowed to look at a novel," but Anne makes a somewhat tenuous generic distinction: "'Oh, how can you call 'Ben Hur' a novel when it's really such a religious book?'" protested Anne. "'Of course it's a little too exciting to be proper reading for Sunday, and I only read it on weekdays'" (241). Anne distinguishes this "religious book" from the Gothic novel *The Lurid Mystery of the Haunted Hall* that Miss Stacy forbids her to read. Several critics argue that Anne's decision to give up the Gothic novel demonstrates her developing self-discipline (see Berg 126; Foster and Simons 157; Epperly 26). Yet Anne continues to read thrilling books that she can justify as "religious," not only recognizing the complex rules surrounding women's reading but manipulating them for her own benefit.

The filmmakers strengthen these connections between Anne's private reading, formal education, and future career by developing Miss Stacey as a female role model who is independent, educated, and intellectual. In the novel, Anne misses the first day of school with Miss Stacy due to a broken ankle, and the teacher remains a minor character whom the reader learns about through Anne's descriptions. Miss Stacey's direct speech and physical presence in the miniseries make her influence much more powerful, especially when she encourages Anne to read literature without making distinctions between types of books as Miss Stacy does in the novel. By making Miss Stacey a more prominent character, the filmmakers provide an ideal teacher for young women viewers and an inspiration for adult women who have finished their formal education and have lost their ability to read for pleasure. Many young women who view these miniseries may have teachers who criticize or mock their reading of "escapist" fiction such as the *Anne of Green Gables* novels — several of my own teachers did so quite memorably. For these students, Miss Stacey takes the role of a teacher who recognizes the value of fiction that provides them with intense pleasure. Adult women who have not read for pleasure since childhood may also be inspired by Miss Stacey's admirable character to return to the act of reading and to share their

favourite books with younger women.

In later scenes, Anne Shirley is drawn to acts of public performance that parallel her acts of private reading: the first is humiliating and even life-threatening while the second wins the sympathy of her community. The filmmakers' revisions to these sections of the novel are fairly subtle: changes in the sequence of events, additional scenes with Gilbert Blythe, and revisions and expansions of Montgomery's literary allusions. Yet these revisions build on Anne's experiences as a reader in the novel and demonstrate the ways in which camera angles, music, and dialogue contribute to the effects of a television adaptation. Anne begins the miniseries as a servant whose book is burned when she neglects her chores, but she will end it a celebrated student whose reading captures the attention of professional artists.

Anne's first public performance of a literary work in the miniseries is based on Montgomery's chapter "An Unfortunate Lily Maid." Anne convinces her friends Diana Barry, Jane Andrews, and Ruby Gillis to act out the final scene from Alfred Tennyson's "Lancelot and Elaine," in which Elaine's family places her corpse on a barge and sends it down the river to Camelot so that Lancelot may see that she has died of love for him. As Anne as the Lily Maid floats along Barry's Pond, the boat springs a leak and she has to climb onto the bridge supports in order to avoid drowning. Anne is deeply humiliated when Gilbert arrives and rescues her, concluding that "I don't ever want to hear the word 'romance' again.... It was easy enough in Camelot but it certainly isn't appreciated in Avonlea." The filmmakers strengthen the impact of this scene from the novel by including passages from "The Lady of Shalott" and combining it with Anne's discovery that she has tied with Gilbert for first place in the entrance examinations to the teacher's college. While Anne read Tennyson in secret in the opening scene of the miniseries, she now demonstrates her potential as a teacher and performer by inspiring her girlfriends to read and to engage critically with poetry.

The scene in the miniseries begins with a debate about who should play the part of Elaine that functions as a commentary on film adaptation as an "inauthentic" but potentially liberating process. When Diana tells Anne that she should be Elaine because it was her idea, Anne reveals her desire for fidelity to the poem:

Anne A red-haired person cannot play the Lily Maid. Tennyson would never approve.

Diana Your complexion is just as fair as Ruby's. And, anyway, your hair is darker now than just plain old red.

Anne Really?

Jane I'd say it's definitely auburn. And that's sort of close to blonde.

Anne Well, all right. It isn't authentic.

This dialogue is based on that in the novel, yet the added lines "Tennyson

would never approve" and "It isn't authentic" anticipate the debates surrounding the adaptation of *Anne of Green Gables* itself. Anne's pleas for historical and textual accuracy throughout this dialogue link her to the critics who fault *Anne of Green Gables* for departing from Montgomery's intentions, the details of the novel, or the late-Victorian setting. Yet when the boat begins to sink, Anne learns the lesson that Pam Cook articulates in her 1996 study of costume films: "the quest for authentic identities is itself doomed" (2). Anne's departure from Tennyson's narrative dramatizes the feminist approach to adaptation in which historical and textual inaccuracies become vehicles for the free play of identity and for the liberation of female viewers from traditional roles. Like the novel, the miniseries takes place in the decades before the turn of the twentieth century. The filmmakers highlight the novelistic scenes in which women's hairstyles and clothing are discussed, analyzed, and criticized in a way that suggests future change. This scene represents Anne's "dressing up" not as an attempt to return to the past but to try on the potential future identities of an actress and a sexually charged adult woman.

The passages from "The Lady of Shalott" create a strong link to the opening scene of the miniseries to emphasize the beginning of Anne's critical distance from Tennyson. Anne recites ten lines from the poem as she floats on the pond. The first five lines are repeated from the opening scene, when Anne recited them before her interruption by Mrs. Hammond:

There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay.
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse is on her if she stay
To look down on Camelot. (1: 390)

The next five lines, excerpted from stanzas near the end of the poem, describe the heroine's death:

And at the closing of the day
The broad stream bore her far away
And as the boat-head wound along,
They heard her singing her last song,
The Lady of Shalott. (1: 394)

When the boat begins to sink, the music that accompanies Anne's reading abruptly ends and the camera cuts from her horrified face to the water pouring into the boat. This time, Anne's reading is interrupted not by an authority figure but by her own resistance to Tennyson's world. She is attracted to the romantic idea of dying for love, but she is unwilling to die or to be rescued by a man in her own life. Anne refuses to give Gilbert credit for saving her since her friends are nearby: "Help is on the way. And I was calmly waiting

for it.”

The filmmakers connect Anne’s role as director of the Lily Maid drama to her future role as teacher by placing this scene after the college entrance examinations, rather than before the exams as in the novel. When they reach the shore of the pond, Gilbert tells Anne that they have tied for first place out of two hundred on the examination pass list. This detail emphasizes Anne’s intellectual equality with Gilbert and suggests her ability to analyze literature in an academic setting.

“Lancelot and Elaine” — a longer and more complex version of “The Lady of Shalott” from *Idylls of the King* — represents the myth of the beautiful pure maiden who dies when her first love is not returned. Elaine falls in love with Lancelot when he visits her castle on the way to the diamond jousts at Camelot, and she faithfully nurses him back to health when he is nearly killed. Since Lancelot cannot return her love due to his longstanding affair with Queen Guinevere, Elaine vows to die and writes a letter for him to read after her death:

I loved you, and my love had no return,
And therefore my true love has been my death.
And therefore to our Lady Guinevere,
And to all other ladies, I make moan:
Pray for my soul, and yield me burial. (3: 458)

When Elaine’s corpse floats to Camelot in the barge, she is admired by all the court and her innocent love inspires Lancelot to consider giving up his affair with the Queen.

Montgomery uses this poem to contrast Tennyson’s Camelot with its ideals of passive femininity to her own Avonlea where Anne’s longing for this world is presented as naïve and comical. The novel states that the girls read “Lancelot and Elaine” in school: “They had analyzed and parsed it and torn it to pieces in general until it was a wonder there was any meaning at all left in it for them, but at least the fair lily maid and Lancelot and Guinevere and King Arthur had become very real people to them” (221). The girls dramatize the poem in order to receive a romantic thrill, yet their experience ends with the lesson that they need to resist the ideal of love at first sight and the fantasy of revenge through suicide. The Lady of Shalott is willing to die for a glance at Lancelot and Elaine falls in love with the knight as soon as she sees him, yet Anne turns her face away from Gilbert: “‘We were playing Elaine,’ explained Anne frigidly, without even looking at her rescuer” (225). This revision of Tennyson’s poem is a key aspect of Montgomery’s feminism as it has been interpreted by critics in the last two decades.

Many critics of the novel describe the lesson that Anne learns from this experience in negative terms. Åhmansson interprets this scene as the moment that Anne “outgrows the need for personae borrowed from romance”

(111) and learns that for women “the elusive world of romance is truly nothing but a dead end” (114). Shirley Foster and Judy Simons make a similar claim: “While the novel as a whole validates the imagination as an important vivifying power, this particular incident...serves as a reminder that fantasy becomes absurd, even dangerous, if it is too far disengaged from the real world” (157). Ross notes that Montgomery’s literary parody leaves room for romance, since “Montgomery anticipates the happy outcome of Gilbert’s role as patient suitor and princess-rescuer, while mocking the romance formula that she herself is using” (“Calling Back” 44). Epperly describes this tension in more negative terms: “In giving up ecstatic identification with Tennyson’s Elaine and the other romantic poems and stories of her childhood and adapting to ‘real’ male-female relations, Anne may merely be conforming to a romanticized stereotype of her times” (37). These critics suggest that while Anne learns to reject Tennyson’s gender politics, she will ultimately accept a conventional romance and marriage to Gilbert.

My own interpretation focuses on Anne’s progression from private reading to public performance, which allows for a more positive view of the Lily Maid scene as evidence of Anne’s determination to read despite all obstacles; such an interpretation comes through much more strongly in the miniseries than in the novel. In contrast to earlier readings of “The Lady of Shalott” and *Ben-Hur*, the Lily Maid scene focuses on Anne’s ability to draw her family, friends, and future romantic partner into the world of her literary imagination. Anne’s near-drowning compels her to outgrow the habit of becoming so absorbed in her reading that she forgets everything around her yet demonstrates her ability to capture the attention and admiration of others. When Marilla Cuthbert scolds Anne for playing the Lily Maid, Anne announces that she has tied for first place in the college entrance examinations. The scene turns into a victory rather than a humiliation, as Rachel Lynde admits: “You’re a credit to us all, and we’re all proud of you.”

Anne’s recitation at a hotel concert later in the miniseries proves her ability to overcome the fear of humiliation and punishment and to inspire others with the passion for reading that she has defended throughout her life. Anne is terrified to go onstage after a professional elocutionist, yet she overcomes her fear and delivers a gripping performance of “The Highwayman” by Alfred Noyes. With this poem, the filmmakers revisit the theme of a woman killing herself for love. The heroine shoots herself to warn her lover that King George’s men are going to arrest him, but rather than recite the lines about the heroine’s death as in the Lily Maid sequence, Anne recites the stanza told from the perspective of the highwayman with his “rapier brandished high,” thus rejecting Elaine’s role for that of Lancelot. Anne refuses to attend the concert with Gilbert and then regrets it, but she ends the scene with her closest female friend: “I am happy, Diana, and nothing is going to hold me back.” This scene represents Anne’s fullest confidence in herself as reader and performer and completes the process that began with her private

recitation of “The Lady of Shalott” in the opening seconds of the miniseries.

The hotel concert suggests that Anne’s reading will bring her community together and form the foundation of her future career. Many characters express their confidence in Anne before the recital: Alice Lawson envies her ability to stand out in public and reminds her that she “can do no wrong in this community” after passing first in the entrance examinations. Matthew Cuthbert gives her a string of pearls, which Anne treasures more than the diamonds worn by the wealthy Americans at the hotel. Marilla does not express her pride in Anne’s accomplishments directly, but her warnings about forming a tie with Gilbert suggest that she expects Anne to have a career beyond the domestic sphere: “You don’t belong in Avonlea anymore.” Gilbert teases her about the Lily Maid episode, suggesting that she give up teaching for “a career on the stage,” but he is the first to stand during the applause following her recitation. Flint claims that reading aloud in the home was recommended for Victorian women, since it allowed them to share established values with their communities and to use their influence for good (100-02). Yet Anne recites in the public space of a hotel where the presence of a female professional elocutionist suggests the possibility of a real “career on the stage.” This shift from private to public reading empowers Anne to influence Avonlea’s perception of women’s roles, which have traditionally included a limited education followed by a lifetime of domestic work.

The filming of this scene emphasizes the contrast between Anne’s previous absorption in books and her self-consciousness during this public performance. In earlier scenes, the camera focuses on Anne as she reads and the music invites the reader to enter the world of her imagination — until she is interrupted, at which point the camera cuts to another image and the music abruptly ends. Yet Anne stands in silence on the hotel stage as the camera cuts between her terrified face and those of various members of her waiting audience, representing the fact that she is all too aware of her surroundings. Anne finally pulls herself together when she sees the smug face of her rival Josie Pye, and she reads for the first time with a total awareness of her environment.

Anne’s reading of “The Highwayman” represents her ability to identify with the powerful hero as well as the suicidal heroine, as she did during the chariot race in *Ben-Hur*. The opening stanza focuses on the mounted hero rather than on the woman waiting in the tower, and the next stanza that Anne recites is the only one in the poem told from the highwayman’s point of view:

“One kiss, my bonny sweetheart, I’m after a prize to-night,
But I shall return with the yellow gold before the morning light;
Yet, if they press me sharply, and harry me through the day,
Look for me by moonlight,
Watch for me by moonlight,
I’ll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way.” (11)

The camera's focus on Gilbert while Anne reads the opening line of the stanza suggests that Anne is able to reverse the gender roles of the Lily Maid scene. She refused to call Gilbert her rescuer while playing Elaine, but she addresses him as her "bonny sweetheart" while playing the highwayman, taking the active male role instead of the passive female one. The last stanza that she recites describes the highwayman's murder rather than the heroine's suicide: "And he lay in his blood on the highway, with a bunch of lace at his throat." In the Lily Maid scene, Anne's belief that literary dramatization must be "authentic" led her to risk her own life by drowning. Anne shows much greater control and flexibility when she takes on the role of the highwayman, using it to assert her power over Josie and Gilbert and then renouncing it when she describes the hero's death.

The miniseries builds on Montgomery's chapter entitled "The Hotel Concert" by increasing Gilbert's role as Anne's friend, rival, and potential romantic partner. In the novel, Gilbert appears only as member of the concert audience whose presence inspires Anne to perform well. In the miniseries, Gilbert asks Anne to attend the concert with him and she refuses after Marilla warns her about forming too strong a tie in her small town. When Anne runs outside after the concert to call Gilbert's name as he drives away from the hotel, the filmmakers suggest that this event has been a missed opportunity as well as a triumph. Yet Gilbert's presence in this scene does not remove the emphasis from Anne's individual development, nor does it suggest her dependence on him. Instead, Anne's recitation of "The Highwayman" takes on another dimension in which she asserts control over their relationship and restores her confidence after her humiliation over being "rescued" in Barry's Pond. This scene demonstrates that Sullivan and Wiesenfeld succeeded in their intention to focus on Anne's development as an individual, not merely in relation to Gilbert. Gilbert forms an important part of Anne's life and her search for community and identity, but his act of leaving this concert does not prevent her from enjoying her triumph and strengthening her connections to others.

The filmmakers' decision to have Anne recite "The Highwayman" — rather than "The Maiden's Vow," as in the novel — also changes the gender politics of this scene. Montgomery does not name the author of "The Maiden's Vow" or provide quotations from the poem, although Anne describes it as "pathetic" and likely to make people cry (269). This description fits the Scottish ballad poem "The Maiden's Vow" by Baroness Nairne, whose anonymously published songs were very popular during the nineteenth century. The poem is worth quoting in full, since it is now difficult to find:

I've made a vow, I'll keep it true,
I'll never married be;
For the only ane that I think on
Will never think o' me.

Now gane to a far distant shore,
Their face nae mair I'll see;
But often will I think o' them,
That winna think o' me.

Gae owre, gae owre noo, gude Sir John,
Oh, dinna follow me;
For the only ane I ere thocht on,
Lies buried in the sea. (232-33)

This poem's obscurity, brevity, and Scottish dialect clearly make it undesirable for a televised adaptation of this scene. More to the point, this poem also describes another passive woman who mourns the tragic death of the man she loves. The change to "The Highwayman" points to Anne's identity in the novel and television sequels as a powerful and rebellious figure who will operate outside the conventions of rural Canadian culture at the turn of the twentieth century. Like the highwayman, she will embody a challenge to traditional institutions that will both frustrate and inspire the people she encounters in her future roles as teacher, writer, wife, mother, and community leader.

Montgomery expressed her fascination with film adaptations as early as the silent era. She wrote in 1921, "I don't know why I keep on going to see my favorite books screened. The result is always a disappointment. And yet I suppose I will keep on doing it whenever the chance comes my way" (*Selected Journals* 3: 26). Montgomery even enjoyed the 1934 adaptation of *Anne of Green Gables* directed by George Nicholls, Jr., despite its sentimental romance plot and the fact that she received no royalty for it:

I am pestered to death by questions as to 'how I like it' and 'what I feel like' seeing my characters 'come to life' like that. I liked it well enough but I had no sense of seeing my characters come to life because they were *not* my characters as I saw them, with the partial exception of 'Anne.' The whole picture was so entirely different from *my* vision of the scenes and the people that it did not seem *my* book at all. It was just a pleasant, well-directed little play by somebody else. (*Selected Journals* 4: 326).

Montgomery's recognition that adaptations should ultimately be judged on their own merits — rather than by how she liked them and how they measured up to her intentions — provides a model for literary critics who study late-twentieth-century adaptations of her work. The 1934 *Anne of Green Gables* may be a "pleasant, well-directed little play," but Sullivan's *Anne of Green Gables* miniseries is something more: a nuanced interpretation of the novel that focuses on the heroine's education, imagination, and intellectual engagement with a variety of literary texts.

Note

- 1 In a letter to me dated 12 Sept. 2000, Wiesenfeld described the process through which he came to write the final shooting script for the film. According to him, Sullivan wrote the first draft of the script himself, but "[h]is partners, particularly PBS and CBC, insisted he bring in a professional writer to rework the script before they would commit to production." Sullivan offered the project to Wiesenfeld, who "did a page one rewrite, which means I changed everything, using as my source...the book itself, rather than his script." This script was used as the shooting script: "The finished film is pretty nearly word for word the written script, except where cuts were made for length in the finished film." Literary critics commonly attribute the entire film to Sullivan, but it is important to note that Wiesenfeld was the primary screenwriter. *Anne of Green Gables* was produced by Sullivan Films and Ventura Pictures in association with a number of television networks and funding agencies around the world, including the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, PBS/Wonderworks, City-TV, ZDF (West Germany), and Telefilm Canada.

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