on an earlier period — Cavendish circa 1900 — while being true to an imaginary setting drawn from fiction— specifically Green Gables, which, he reminds us, Montgomery made "a more appealing place than it was in reality" (255). Indeed, one of the underlying discourses that emerges in this section, though it is not fully drawn out, is the idea of Avonlea as a collective fantasy responding to the ills associated with modernity, both at the turn of the twenty-first century and the turn of the twentieth. Overall, this section is the strongest of the three, engaging with commodification and reception and offering a prismatic view of the meanings of Avonlea as both sacred and profane, as "both the one place and no place at all" (Fiamengo 237).

Along with scholarly essays (only some of which are mentioned in this review), the book also contains "Snapshots," described as "essays that provide firsthand insight into and personal experience with the Avonlea world" (13). Two of the more fascinating ones are in the tourism section: Tara MacPhail's piece on the business and art of making Anne and Emily dolls; and Tara Nogler's account of the time she spent playing Anne at a Japanese theme park called Canadian World. They stand out for showing the very real labour involved in "making Avonlea."

Where the book makes its most noteworthy impression is as a collective dialogue on the contradictory nature of popular culture: from the affective to the economic, from the national to the transcultural, from the ridiculous to the sublime. As this stellar anthology effectively proves, Montgomery has a lot to teach us about popular culture in all of its manifestations. Certainly, once Montgomery's texts become static and fossilized, their meanings secured for all time, they will cease to be popular. Until that happens, Gammel's worthy collection deserves a space on the shelf of anyone seeking to understand popular culture in general and Montgomery's enduring popularity in particular.

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Children's Short Films (Inspired by the Sprockets Film Festival) / *Angela Stukator*

Confection. Dir. Eva Saks. USA, 5 min., 2003.

Delivery Day. Dir. Janet Manning. Australia, 26 min., 2001.

The Chinese Violin. Dir. Joe Chang. Canada, 9 min., 2002.

Roses Sing on New Snow. Dir. Yuan Zhang. Canada, 6 min., 2002.

Glasses. Dir. Brian Duchscherer. Canada, 23 min., 2002.

Swapped. Dir. Pierre Monnard. Switzerland/UK, 10 min., 2001.

Bush Bikes. Dir. David S. Valveloo. Australia, 6 min., 2003.

Olivia's Puzzle. Dir. Jason DaSilva. Canada/India, 12 min., 2001.

I Wanna Dance. Dir. Magriet van Loggerenberg, South Africa, 15 min., 2001.

Disa Moves to Japan. Dir. Benedicte Maria Orvung, 25 min., Norway 2002.

A Conversation with Harris. Dir. Sheila M. Sofian. USA, 6 min., 2001.

Hidden. Dir. Hanna Heilborn, David Aronowitsch, and Mats Johansson. Sweden/Finland/Denmark, 8 min., 2002.

Children's film, like children's culture, is not produced by those who consume it. That's a trite fact but worth returning to because it opens up a set of questions about the production of childhood by filmmakers and about the experience of consuming that production by children. In particular, I want to examine the ways in which adults imagine children and childhood in some recent films. What kinds of subject matter do they address? Are the films *about* children or *for* children — if so, which children? Do they capture the audience of children? Are there differences in children's cinema that can be attributed to culture, ethnicity, class, or any other factors? What are the similarities which allow us to talk about a category of children's cinema? And finally, what is the relationship between children's cinema and the other cinema, the one we refer to as "the cinema"?

Sprockets, a children's film festival held in Toronto each spring for the past six years, provides a rare opportunity to survey children's cinema. It is an international film festival with more than 50 films programmed over two weekends. To narrow my field, I chose to focus on children's short films that were organized into programs by subject matter such as "Celebrating Strength" or similar style, as in the case of "Animation Nation." My decision to concentrate on short films was not motivated by pragmatism. Shortness and young children go together. Short stories, short television programs, short concerts — the short(er) duration of children's culture has too easily been justified as a consequence of children's attention span. Whether this is true or not isn't particularly relevant to my argument. Nor is the related and implicit idea that people who create children's films, stories, or television use the short form as the container to shape the subject matter. What does influence my study of short films is the recognition of an intractable fusion of form and subject matter. Adopting a definition from a literary theory, I will consider the short film as a form that "is short because it deals with special, brief sort of experience and that this experience is most suitable to the short [film]" (Lohafer and Clarey 22). At their best, short films, like other types of short culture, afford an experience of totality and wholeness not despite but because of the briefness of the experience.

Short children's films are notably different from their closest relative, the short television program, by their ratio of standardization and innovation. Short television programs strive to carve out a unique niche within the private or public broadcast market, but once this is accomplished, they maintain appeal and popularity through the repetition of characters, predictable activities, consistent stylistic tech-

niques, and the satisfaction of established expectations. By contrast, short films strive toward uniqueness from each other and also from other short and long cultural forms. In fact, children's short films exploit a dramatic and aesthetic license that challenges the canonical definitions of film. The best of children's short films are distinguished by a form and an aesthetic that not only excite the imagination of children. As I will venture, these films are leading the art of cinema in innovative, fresh, and political directions that challenge conventional ways of seeing the world. (Note: All Canadian films are available through the National Film Board of Canada <http://www.nfb.ca>.)

> "The thing about short films is that they're short so even if you don't like them, they're over sooner than a long film. You don't have time to fall asleep."
>
> — Molly, age eight

Take for example, *Confection* (Eva Saks, USA, 2003), a five minute-long film. It begins with a window of pastries — gorgeous, expensive pastries. A young hand slides across the glass and then abruptly stops at a multi-layered strawberry with whipped cream and custard tart. Cut to outside the shop where we see the girl, Amanda, and her mother, both immediately recognizable as exceedingly wealthy by virtue of the clothes, hair, accessories, and stance. The place is Manhattan. Despite the fact that she is carrying a decadent tart in her open hand, her mother is oblivious to Amanda, as are the people on the street. That is, until she passes a homeless man, and his direct look motivates Amanda to suddenly become protective of her prize treat. She moves defensively away from him and toward an intersection. This physical turn is echoed in the narrative which turns from realism into fantasy. Amanda sees a rich man looking for something: A taxi? A limo? She turns away from him and becomes absorbed in a poster advertising the ballet. In a straight cut she is transported to a magical space where she becomes the ballerina. Still holding her strawberry tart, she dances to a short piece by Tchaikovsky. Then, in another straight cut she is reinserted into the real world. Her eyes revisit the man, who is still searching; her mother who still seems annoyed; and finally, the homeless man. Only he returns her gaze, smiling knowingly; only he has shared her magical flight. In recognition, she walks over to him and hands him her precious tart. The narrative captures the wonder of the child, her capacity to fantasize, and, moreover, the power of imagination that challenges the limits of the clichéd reality.

Confection is a realist narrative, even when it dips into Amanda's fantasy. Many of the other dramatic shorts have a similar style and resolve their stories with an epiphany of equal strength. *Delivery Day* (Janet Manning, Australia, 2001) tells the story of an 11-year-old girl, Trang, whose family has emigrated from Vietnam to Australia. The narrative traces Trang's desire to attend a parent-teacher meeting with her mother or uncle, set against the pressure of the family to fill the quota of their laundry delivery. In a touching conclusion, Trang's antagonistic older brother takes Trang to the interview, performing the role of the father, and missing the important delivery deadline. The story is simple but the message is not. Woven into the characters and their activities is the ambivalence of the immigrant: the absent father and other relatives, victims of the Vietnam war; the hidden and illegal working activities of the immigrants, housing a laundry business in their garage; the determination of the elders to make viable a better future for their chil-

dren by prioritizing private school education despite the difficult economic conditions; the struggle to communicate in a foreign land with a foreign language; the neglect of children who are forced to become independent and responsible far ahead of their time; and the tenderness of the family who survive these kinds of adversities.

> "That kid was so weird. I'd love to have a rabbit or a gorilla mask but no way would I trade my dad."
>
> — Aidan, age six

The realist aesthetic is also descriptive of the National Film Board (NFB) of Canada's collection of animated narrative shorts. Two which were included in Sprockets are typical of the NFB's adaptation of children's stories: *The Chinese Violin* (Joe Chang, Canada, 2002) and *Roses Sing on New Snow* (Yuan Zhang, Canada, 2002). The films are drawn in a standard style that remains faithful to the realist illustrations of the original source. These films simply transfer the images from the book into images on the screen, thus functioning much like talking books; they are talking and seeing books. Alternatively, an NFB film (not screened as part of this year's Sprocket festival), *Glasses* (Brian Duchscherer, Canada, 2002), provides a novel use of puppet animation to convey the trials and tribulations of getting eyeglasses. This narrative centers on Milo, a grade one student who is near-sighted and a victim of schoolyard bullying. The filmmaker uses animation to transform the recognizable world of the protagonist into a surreal, mutable world of subjective experiences. For example, fear of an optometrist's office is visualized by the monstrous machine descending upon Milo, and his lunch box becomes a visual barometer of the ever-changing fears he confronts before and after he gets his glasses.

Arguably the most interesting short films are those, like *Glasses*, which create a fantastic world that defies temporal and spatial integrity, perceptual realism and linear narrative. In these films, anything can happen. While animation has a particular license toward the creative treatment of the world, there are some quite brilliant examples of the magical treatment in short live-action dramatic films and short documentary films. *Swapped* (Pierre Monnard, Switzerland/UK, 2001) is the hilarious story of William who swaps his dad for two goldfish. When his mother finds out, he is forced to find his father and return the goldfish; by that time, his father has been swapped for an electric guitar, a gorilla mask, and a rabbit. The aesthetic rendering of the film is unique, a bizarre transformation of objective realism through grainy film stock, extreme close-ups, canted angles, and curious representations. For example, the father is only ever seen sitting in a chair, his face concealed by a newspaper; this is how he looks when he is originally swapped and when he is found in the rabbit's outdoor coop. The mother only appears from her neck down. And a strange unidentified older man inexplicably enters and exits the frame riding a tractor lawn mower. The effect of the aestheticized world with images that are out of whack yet photographically recognizable is a visual parallel to the strangeness and absurdity of the story.

> "The films were really sad, I mean that people live that way. But I liked hearing about different places and kids who are able to survive war and stuff."
>
> — Dylan, age ten

The mix of realist treatment and heightened stylizing was unexpectedly evident in the documentary films shown throughout the festival. The documentary short films all featured young children: *Bush Bikes* (David S. Valveloo, Australia, 2003) is a portrait of young Aboriginal boys who, despite their poverty, find ingenious ways of creating bicycles; *Olivia's Puzzle* (Jason DaSilva, Canada/India, 2001) weaves together the lives of a seven-year-old girl living in British Columbia and a seven-year-old girl in Goa, India; *I Wanna Dance* (Magriet van Loggerenberg, South Africa, 2001) is the story of a nine-year-old boy who enters a ballroom dancing competition with his cousin; and *Disa Moves to Japan* (Benedicte Maria Ovrung, Norway, 2002) is about a four-year-old Norwegian girl who moves to Japan with her mother. In these examples, the documentaries had subject matter of more or less interest to the young audience. The running length of the films is less important than strategies, often surprising ones, used to hold the audience's attention. A short-short film like Bush Bikes, with a duration of six minutes, is engaging because it is able to maintain energy and focus through music, editing, and quite extraordinary cinematography. *I Wanna Dance*, at 15 minutes, seems slow and interest wanes; the images are observational, the boy's voice-over narration explains what we are seeing, and the film is structured chronologically leading up to the competition and the outcome. The cousins do not win (they come in fourth), and the undramatic conclusion is consistent with the undramatic treatment of their practices and family life. For a young audience, there is little to hold their attention and thus 15 minutes seems like a long time. *Disa Moves to Japan*, at 25 minutes, provides a notable comparison to *I Wanna Dance*. The audience was made up of kids who were, on average, eight years old. Therefore, they are old enough to see the humour in the antics of a four-year-old: Disa eating the plastic grass from the sushi platter, asking repeatedly where the telly is in their new Japanese apartment, and suffering distress as the Asian children in daycare fight to touch Disa's brilliant blond hair. These light moments punctuate the fascinating and informative look at Japan from an outsider's perspective.

What can we make of the "really sad" films that break away from the traditional documentary style of *I Wanna Dance* or *Disa Moves to Japan*? There were a number of documentaries that employed unusual and highly idiosyncratic stylistic devices to render difficult but important subject matter. In *A Conversation with Harris* (Sheila M. Sofian, USA, 2001), animation is used to represent Harris's world. An 11-year-old Bosnian boy, Harris now lives in the United States. He tells of his experience in the Bosnian war and of the series of tragedies his family experienced. The animation does not strive for verisimilitude; rather it becomes, through the colour, texture, and density of the painting, a visual manifestation of Harris's emotional landscape, his world turned nightmare. Another example, *Hidden* (Hanna Heilborn, David Aronowitsch, Mats Johansson, Sweden/Finland/Denmark, 2002), is an extraordinary document of a young boy from Peru who was left in his home country for one year while his parents were in Sweden seeking refugee status. Eventually, he was brought to Sweden but, with the visa not yet secured, he was forced to hide. The boy is visually hidden by rendering him as a cartoon image, not of a child but of a blue, simple figure with only the most rudimentary facial features: lips, huge eyes, and stick-lines for hair. He is interviewed by an equally whimsical pink figure. There is cuteness about the figures but it never undermines the seriousness of the history. Arguably, it alleviates the despair that culminates in text which informs the viewer that he attempted to commit suicide and, consequently, a visa was is-

sued. The figure describes the experience of being left alone in Peru, of running from authorities, of his younger friends being picked up because they couldn't run as fast; and of hiding from anyone in Sweden who might call in the authorities and, especially, of the unbearable loneliness suffered until the age of 12. Specific locations, such as the streets of Peru, the school playground and classrooms in Sweden are represented in colourized images, framed within the larger image. Thus, all details, while factual, are explicitly presented as manipulated, constructed, coloured, shaped, drawn.

Hidden, like many of the films discussed, contributes to new possibilities in cinema that challenge conventional category labels through the bold mixing of formal and stylistic strategies. My opinion of these films as pushing and pulling at "the cinema" and its established types of filmmaking found unforeseen support when I discovered that *Hidden* was simultaneously screened at Sprockets and Hot Docs, a festival of documentary cinema. Competing against equally powerful subject matter but more conventional forms, *Hidden* was awarded Best International Short Documentary. At 12 minutes in duration, the story of one boy stands in for the stories of all innocent children who are victims of the injustice and inequity of the adult world, bent as it is on maintaining imaginary boundaries of difference. Significantly, the collapse of formal, aesthetic and thematic boundaries evident in *Hidden* — through its use of the short form, animated, realist, and experimental aesthetics, as well as political, historical, and factual subject matter — provides a potent echo to the film's message. Finally, and to anticipate my next review essay, the innovations of the short children's films are evident in a number of recent feature films. The most powerful statement of this fact is the surprise Academy Award in the category of foreign film: it went to the Japanese anime film, *Spirited Away* (Hayao Miyazaki, Japan, 2001).

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Much Ado About Nothing: For Kids or for Teachers? / *Marissa McHugh*

Much Ado About Nothing: For Kids. Lois Burdett. Firefly, 2002. 64 pp. $8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55209-413-8.

Much Ado About Nothing: For Kids is Lois Burdett's eighth Shakespeare adaptation in her *Shakespeare Can Be Fun!* series for children. The books in this series aim to present Shakespeare's plays in theatrical story forms that are accessible and enter-