

**A life and its mirrors: A feminist reading of L.M. Montgomery's fiction.** Gabriella Åhmansson. Sweden: Uppsala, 1991. 183 pp., paper. ISBN 91-554-2673-5.

What a relief and delight it is at last to have a good, full-length feminist study of Montgomery's work. In the last ten years Montgomery scholarship has changed dramatically, largely due to wide-spread acceptance of feminist analysis and the insistence on taking seriously women's voices and women's ways of being. And now, with the publication of Gabriella Åhmansson's doctoral thesis (this is volume one of a projected two), we have a solid, scholarly, readable, feminist analysis of *Anne of green gables* and *Anne's house of dreams* in relationship to Montgomery's life.

Using Montgomery's life as a grounding, Åhmansson examines the gender expectations, concepts of romance, and attitudes to education, sexuality, and marriage that shape and influence Anne Shirley. Montgomery's fascination with romance is thoughtfully discussed in a section called "Lady Anne Cordelia Elaine Shirley and the elusive world of romance." It is a pleasure to see the friendship of Leslie Moore and Anne Shirley Blythe get close attention – there is much in that intimacy and intertwining that has begged for careful feminist reading.

Åhmansson's work shows all the strengths and some of the regrettable but perhaps inevitable weaknesses of a strong doctoral thesis that has been published as is. Åhmansson has done her academic work admirably, making good use of recent criticism as well as of Montgomery's journals and letters; the footnotes are full and informative. She has read carefully in feminist criticism and the works cited will suggest a detailed and colourful map to those who have also made and followed charts in new feminist lands. Her reading of Montgomery's texts is full of insight. Unfortunately, in a doctoral thesis, much has to be explained and reviewed in the first chapters in a detail that the non-academic may find wearisome. Non-scholars may not want an article-by-article review of the critical literature on Montgomery or Anne, and scholars of Montgomery will know most of this terrain already. Nevertheless, when Åhmansson does get into the discussion of *Anne of green gables* and *Anne's house of dreams*, the pace quickens and readers interested in decoding Montgomery's multiple and conflicting subtexts will find rich material here.

There are sure to be many other studies of Montgomery in the next few years and scholars and general readers alike can be grateful to Åhmansson for doing some of the less glamorous spade work in the early sections of this book. Since she has done such fine work in volume one, it will be intriguing to see

how Åhmansson probes the Emily books, *The blue castle*, and *Rilla of Ingleside* in the proposed volume two.

**Elizabeth R. Epperly**, *Acting Head of English at Memorial University of Newfoundland*, is a co-editor of *Montgomery's letters*. Her study *L.M. Montgomery's heroines and the pursuit of romance* is to be published by the *University of Toronto Press* in 1992.

#### THE QUINTESSENTIAL SHAPESHIFTER

**P.L. Travers**. Patricia Demers. Twayne, 1991. 160 pp., \$21.95 U.S. cloth. ISBN 0-8057-7005-4.

This book makes me want to reread P.L. Travers's *Mary Poppins* stories. That alone makes it a useful book. Moreover, it gives a particular light with which to undertake that rereading, and thus it is a valuable book. I am very grateful to Patricia Demers.

That said, let us commiserate with her for the limitations within which she has had to work. First, the "protective privacy, which often appears to be prickliness, of P.L. Travers herself" (113) and her "aversion to analysis" (2) set severe limits upon the biographical element of the book. The twelve pages of chapter one, "A Writer's Life," is all we get, though it is enough to establish the "sense of continuity and integration" (2) Demers claims for her. The childhood details and memories we are shown only make us want more, to help us connect and recognize some of the reverberant details of the books – such as the child's making of miniature city-parks. Travers insists that, like any writer of a "successful children's book" (115), she does not write for children, nor for "some image of her distant child-self" but as the adult who "still is that child" (111). Her assertion of the interconnectedness of child and adult experience both lived and written means that, with however ignoble a curiosity, we long for more about what Demers refers to tantalizingly as "the continuous cycle of return and restoration in Travers' own life" (112).

The second source of frustration we have to guess at: the limitations which Demers' editors seem to have imposed make for frustrating reading, as they probably made for frustrating writing and revising. There simply is insufficient room to deal any more than adequately with some of the issues she raises. For instance, Demers manages to address the charge of racism by emphasizing the 1981 revision of the "Bad Tuesday" chapter in *Mary Poppins*, and glancing at the larger context. She reiterates the need to be "sensible," neither tolerating "unacceptable, however unwittingly embedded, racist bias" nor sanitizing robust literature, but calling for "genuinely liberating" and "empowering" reading (96).