Anne of Green Gables, Elijah of Buxton, and Margaret of Newfoundland

—Margaret Mackey

For a century, L.M. Montgomery's novel *Anne of Green Gables* has dominated Canadian children's literature. In Canada, Anne is instantly recognizable in any medium; two red braids and a straw hat are usually enough to trigger the identification. As a national figure, she has been reincarnated in many different forms. But beyond the red hair, Anne is a character whose fictional life is firmly rooted in a particular space and time. Nineteenth-century Avonlea is the ground to Anne's figure, and she is most clearly seen in this specific context.

In this article, I will undertake three related activities. Firstly, I will explore some versions of *Anne of Green Gables*, drawing on the original novel and a number of contemporary reworkings, investigating the *Anne of Green Gables* universe in terms of different artistic renderings of time and space (using Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope), and interrogating what happens to that universe as it is commercially expanded and exploited. Secondly, I will draw on a new novel, Christopher Paul Curtis's *Elijah of Buxton*, a book entirely unconnected to the oeuvre of L.M. Montgomery yet profoundly related to important questions of national story, myth, and core identity. I will re-read *Anne of Green Gables* in the light of this challenging Canadian narrative, set in the same period, though in a very different social (and narrative) community. Thirdly (and simultaneously), I will introduce an element often missing in critical essays: the personal reader. Just as anthropologists have sometimes collected data about a community and then, in their public writings, erased the significance of their own role as a temporary member of that group, so critical writers and scholars have often silently elided their own personal reading from their subsequent account

of the text. In this article, I hope to restore that omission by clarifying my own historically situated readings of *Anne of Green Gables* as part of my developing understanding of the significance of this story.

Part I

Bakhtin's concept of the "chronotope," the artistic rendition of time and space, may help us to understand the location of *Anne of Green Gables* as a piece of national literature.

> In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. (84)

Montgomery places Anne in a space-time location through a variety of detailed approaches. Most famously, perhaps, she utilizes the powers of description to place Anne in Prince Edward Island. Here is Anne spotting Green Gables for the first time:

> She opened her eyes and looked about her. They were on the crest of a hill. The sun had set some time since, but the landscape was still clear in the mellow afterlight. To the west a dark church spire rose up against a marigold sky. Below was a little valley, and beyond a long, gently rising slope with snug farmsteads scattered along it. From one to another the child's eyes darted, eager and wistful. At last they lingered on one away to the left, far back from the road, dimly white with blossoming trees in the twilight of the surrounding woods. Over it, in the stainless south-west sky, a great crystal-white star was shining like a lamp of guidance and promise.
>
> "That's it, isn't it?" she said, pointing. (71–72)

As so often with Montgomery, the space she describes is delineated by the time of day (most often sunset). This artistic decision allows the author to heighten the glamour and glory of a commonplace little village; whatever is humdrum and repetitive about Avonlea is sublimated to the uniqueness of the individual sunset (for this reader at least, the sunset descriptions do merge after exposure to a very small number of them, but it is clear that every detail was a distinctive one-off for Montgomery).

Less frequently, to "thicken" the depiction of Avonlea life, Montgomery draws on historical or quasi-historical connections. For example, when Anne is reconciled with Diana and the Barrys after the drinking episode, through the rescue of Minnie May from a life-threatening case of croup, many of the women of Avonlea are away because the prime minister has come to Charlottetown.

> It was in January the Premier came, to address his loyal supporters and such of his non-supporters as chose to be present at the monster mass meeting held in Charlottetown. Most of the Avonlea people were on the Premier's side of politics; hence, on the night of the meeting nearly all the men and a goodly proportion of the women had gone to town, thirty miles away. Mrs. Rachel Lynde had gone too. Mrs. Rachel Lynde was a red-hot politician and couldn't have believed that the political rally could be carried through without her, although she was on the opposite side of politics. So she went to town and took her husband—Thomas would be useful in looking after the horse—and Marilla Cuthbert with her. Marilla had a sneaking interest in politics herself, and as she thought it might be her only chance to see a real life Premier, she promptly took it, leaving Anne and Matthew to keep house until her return the following day. (179)

Such historical specificity reinforces the "just exactly here" and "just exactly now" detail that makes a chronotope reverberate with grounded particularity—even if it is difficult to place a real prime-ministerial visit in the historical time frame. Montgomery selects a few telling details: Rachel Lynde's casual dismissal of her husband as useful with the horse is placed up against the fact that the majority of those attending the rally are male. Mrs. Lynde might not perceive herself as contesting the gender politics of her day, but the dissonance adds to the rich specificity of this brief account.

In my view, Montgomery's most successful tactic is to thicken time and charge space by means of the voices of the community, as featured in the daily gossip of Avonlea. Anne is rooted in this community and in "the movements of time, plot and history" by her conversations with other people. Bakhtin's concept of "heteroglossia" is useful to consider here. His editor, Michael Holquist, helpfully glosses this term as follows, drawing an indissoluble link between the word and the place and time of its utterance:

> At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions—social, historical, meteorological, physiological—that will insure

> that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions. (428)

The voices of Avonlea ring true in terms of both content and cadence, down-to-earth and sure of their own opinions as they are. Here is Marilla, for example, on the subject of Anne's new dresses:

> "Pretty!" Marilla sniffed. "I didn't trouble my head about getting pretty dresses for you. I don't believe in pampering vanity, Anne, I'll tell you that right off. Those dresses are good, sensible, serviceable dresses, without any frills or furbelows about them, and they're all you'll get this summer. The brown gingham and the blue print will do you for school when you begin to go. The sateen is for church and Sunday school. I'll expect you to keep them neat and clean and not to tear them. I should think you'd be grateful to get most anything after those skimpy wincey things you've been wearing." (124–25)

Marilla's implacable strictures both move the plot forward, creating the initial set-up for the glory of the dress with puffed sleeves, and let us gain an early glimpse of the Puritan side of Avonlea against which Anne and her imagination will struggle.

Often, we hear the Avonlea voices through Anne's reworking of them. Here, for example, is a vignette from Avonlea School, as Anne gives Marilla a summary of her first day:

> "I think I'm going to like school here," she announced. "I don't think much of the master, though. He's all the time curling his moustache and making eyes at Prissy Andrews. Prissy is grown-up, you know. She's sixteen and she's studying for the entrance examination into Queen's Academy at Charlottetown next year. Tillie Boulter says the master is *dead gone* on her. She's got a beautiful complexion and curly brown hair and she does it up so elegantly. She sits in the long seat at the back and he sits there, too, most of the time—to explain her lessons, he says. But Ruby Gillis says she saw him writing something on her slate and when Prissy read it she blushed red as a beet and giggled; and Ruby Gillis says she doesn't believe it had anything to do with the lesson." (150–51)

This discussion is strongly of its place and time in its phraseology ("curling his moustache," "making eyes," "dead gone") and in its reference to the one-room schoolhouse where the students' agenda is sometimes antithetical to the teacher's.

Anne is iconic to a point almost past caricaturing. Yet contemporary reworkings (of which there are many) sacrifice the rich disputes of Avonlea life for a more sentimental and schematic version.

Anne's report oscillates between teacher's voice and students' counterpoints. Similarly, Marilla's instant rebuke of such impertinence is redolent of a particular historical attitude. The specifics serve to supply a detailed and persuasive incarnation of the chronotope of Avonlea, as well as giving us a livelier sense of Anne as a social participant. As these voices serve to locate Anne in her setting, they also provide me as a reader with a "thickened" Avonlea that is concrete and vivid; the ground is thus laid for me to trust Montgomery's perspectives on other topics as well. The texture of the competing discourses renders Montgomery's Avonlea a dynamic fictional site where invented characters may contest each other's point of view.

This lively world has long held a cherished place in Canadian literature. In contemporary Canada, Anne is iconic to a point almost past caricaturing. Yet contemporary reworkings (of which there are many) sacrifice the rich disputes of Avonlea life for a more sentimental and schematic version. Adaptor Kevin Sullivan, for example, is famous for his four television miniseries versions of *Anne* and several spin-offs; he is somewhat less well known as the producer of *Anne of Green Gables: The Animated Series*, which boasts an associated website, <http://annetoon.com>. The animated version of Avonlea, in particular, seems designed to test the limits of domestic banality (how else can we interpret "One True Friend," an episode in which the main plotline is that Diana has head lice?). Anne is wholesome to begin with, and her contemporary commodifiers have sanitized her further (the head-lice saga, for all its transgressive potential, takes a hygienic stance as its guiding motif). In their didactic simplicity, new manifestations of Anne often caricature the nitty-gritty conflicts of Avonlea life that Montgomery created so adroitly, simplifying the idiosyncrasies of minor characters and creating a more bucolic Avonlea without the many prickles that Montgomery describes.

On the other hand, these manifestations complicate the issue of the chronotope in different, contemporary ways, by taking for granted that their users will be completely at home with a variety of

ontological complexities. It is worth considering whether the kinds of layering of different levels of fiction that we will see below actually work best on the basis of a relatively simple chronotope; whether, in fact, too much else is going on in these reworkings to allow for a complex setting to be fully imagined.

In order to explore these and other questions, let us investigate some of the new Annes.

Anne's Diary is a social website for children where entry is confirmed by fingerprint reader to ensure child safety. Little girls are encouraged to write journal entries, to correspond with each other, and to buy *Anne of Green Gables* stuff. "Our goal," says the website,

> . . . is to establish a virtual world specifically designed for and utilized by Green Gables fans of all ages. Taking Anne as our inspiration, the site will offer an entertaining and educational environment where users are encouraged to explore their creativity through the use of a personal interactive diary that will walk them through their daily tasks and reminders as well as providing them with a unique space in which to record their adventures and wishes. ("Anne's Diary")

There is no question that the original Anne was obliged by Marilla to complete her "daily tasks and reminders" before getting on with being creative, but the priorities listed in the website's outline do have a discouragingly parent-approved quality to them. The "scope for imagination" seems to be restricted here, just as in Marilla's household; perhaps that element is consciously introduced to appeal to the parents who must pay the subscription fees, but it does seem to undercut the potential for appeal to child users.

It is a notable, though perhaps not surprising, feature of this website that security on the sign-in requirements is relaxed if you want to check out the site store; and even non-members are free to shop for Montgomery and Sullivan texts (the two advertised dolls were not available for purchase the day I looked). The importance of child safety online is less paramount, apparently, if that child is thinking about spending money.

Anne's Diary reflects a layered universe where the fiction of Green Gables is used to frame the writings of actual little girls. The trope of the safe Canadian village of yester-year functions as a kind of imaginary picket fence around these writings that are, in actuality, secured by radical technologies that Anne and her fellow citizens could never have imagined. The chronotope of Avonlea is significantly simplified in order to support a simultaneous appeal to girls and their

parents to encourage both of them to want a subscription to this site.

Similar complexity attends a different embodied corporate representation of Anne. The symbolic importance of Anne as national image, even national cliché, is underlined by her appearance in the back story of the dolls known as the Maplelea Girls (the name is an amalgamation of maple leaves and Avonlea, and the dolls are created by a company named Avonlea Traditions, which was initially developed to sell *Anne of Green Gables* dolls and keepsakes ["About Avonlea Traditions"]). The Maplelea Girls are clearly designed to offer Canadian complements and/or competition to the very successful American Girl dolls—although the Canadian dolls represent geographical regions rather than historical periods. One of four dolls available in early 2008 is Jenna, who introduces herself on the website in the following terms:

> Hi! Jenna's the name, but some people call me Flash, probably because I'm a girl in motion. I live in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, right beside the Atlantic Ocean. I have fiery red hair and a personality to match. Music and the sea are in my blood—I love the fiddle and I love to sail. I also really love shepherd's pie, soccer and running (well, all sports really), meeting new people, and generally just having fun. ("Jenna")

The fiery red hair is our first clue. Guess what! There's a school play, and Jenna is going to play Anne of Green Gables. Among Jenna's "accessories" in the online catalogue for the Maplelea Girls is the following blurb:

> Jenna has just learned that she has won the leading role in her school's production of Anne of Green Gables [sic]. This is the costume she will wear as she plays Anne Shirley in the classic Canadian story that has been charming people around the world for almost a hundred years. The soft **corduroy pinafore** goes over the long sleeve **print dress**. On opening night she will clutch her **carpet bag** and hold on to her **straw hat** as she waits in eager anticipation for Matthew to pick her up at the train station. Highly detailed **old fashioned boots**, ribbed brown **tights**, green **hair ribbons** and, of course, the necessary **bloomers** complete her costume. Includes **journal pages** and a Maplelea **hanger**. ("Anne of Green Gables Costume")

When you buy this costume for your doll, you buy into a complexly layered fantasy: the doll is a real, corporeal object, but Jenna's personality and back story are virtual, outlined in considerable detail in the diary that comes with the doll. The costume is tangible too, but it represents the point

where one fictional character plays the role of a second fictional character with different creative and historical roots (roots that are doubled if you consider the original Anne and the adapted Anne of the stage play, created by a different author). To underline the shift in proprietary relations, a postscript to the sales blurb above earnestly explains who owns what:

> Anne of Green Gables is a trademark and a Canadian Official Mark of the Anne of Green Gables Licensing Authority, used under license by Avonlea Traditions Inc. Maplelea Girls and Jenna McAllister and all related indicia are trademarks of Avonlea Traditions Inc. ("Anne of Green Gables Costume")

The upshot of this legerdemain is a threefold fiction: (1) Jenna, the doll; (2) Anne of Green Gables, the stage role, an acted part; (3) Anne of Green Gables, the original fictional character. Which layer does your doll represent to you? All of the above? How complicated is it for a child to move between these different layers of fantasy?

Whatever the shifts involved in the doll's identity, the commercial transaction is concrete enough. Jenna costs just under $100, and the "Anne" costume costs another $50. For a further $50, you can also acquire an old-fashioned school desk, "a miniature replica of what was actually used in Canadian classrooms in the 1800s. Made of wood and metal" ("Old Fashioned School Desk"). The picture for this desk includes an image of Jenna dressed up as Anne, but in the advertising copy, the desk itself is referenced to the real world of Canadian children in the 1800s—a fourth layer in this elaborate fictional shadow play. The desk comes with a note explaining that it is "perfect for displaying dolls and teddy bears, or for gentle play" (not quite so perfect for displaying Jenna/Anne, as the doll's stiff legs and arms make it awkward to seat her convincingly at the desk). Here the *Anne* chronotope merges with commercially induced nostalgia. Paradoxically, the loving, concrete details of the physical reproduction of the desk invoke a purposefully vague space and time of "the good old days"; the specifics of Montgomery's detailed chronotope of Avonlea are lost in a crowd of more generic warm fuzzies.

The "journal pages" (including some inviting blank sheets) that come with every purchase of doll or costume encourage young buyers to write themselves into a personal space that offers some complex mix of their own lives and their imaginative involvement with the universe of the Maplelea dolls. Jenna herself has "written" an account of her own life in the diary that comes with the doll, mixing drawings of her doll face

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with photographs of Lunenberg (McAllister 12–13), where she purports to live, and photographs of real girls labelled as Jenna's soccer team (15), in yet another sleight of modality. "I love the Anne character," Jenna confides in her diary, "because even though she is forever getting herself into predicaments, she always looks on the bright side of things. As Anne says, 'Tomorrow is a new day with no mistakes in it yet'" ("Red Hair and Freckles"). This reduction of Anne to a perky slogan undercuts the complexities of Avonlea life presented in the original chronotope of the books, but the complex of space-time relationships embodied in the doll/actress/fictional character is by no means straightforward.

In general, however, commodification is a powerful simplifier. *Anne of Green Gables* is not the only story to lose its granularity and particularity in the creation of *stuff* to sell. And Sullivan is not the only adaptor to sentimentalize his product for television. Perhaps this explanation is sufficient to account for the banalities of the reworked Annes—or perhaps there are qualities specific to Montgomery's work that aid the process.

In all of these examples, the shape-shifting elements of contemporary re-renderings of Anne blur the qualities of the distinctive chronotope that appears in the books. To some extent, such evacuation of specific meaning is part of what happens when capitalism meets fiction. But it is not quite that simple; for starters, Anne's role as heroine of a nationally valued work of literature makes everything more complex. The relationship between this imagined girl and the real country of Canada was already ontologically complicated, long before the corporate powers of the Maplelea Girls got to work. The guardians of the Montgomery estate and government gatekeepers of Canadian identity have been playing chronotope games for many years.

The real scenery of Cavendish, Prince Edward Island, for example, has long been colonized for literary tourists and is now a National Historic Site ("Green Gables Heritage Site"). Visiting

Green Gables House at the age of thirteen, I felt foolish when I realized I was peering out of Anne's window to look for the light in Diana's window; not surprisingly, a girl who didn't exist was not lighting lamps to catch my attention. But evoking such a complex reaction, in an effort to blur all boundaries between geography and invention, is part of the mandate of the Green Gables museum, and these fuzzy edges are now one part of the story of Anne. Visiting Green Gables is a lifetime ambition for many readers who want to experience their own bodies in Anne's surroundings.

Border blending occurs in many of the instantiations of Anne's world, and the role of the author is sometimes merged into the fictional universe. One of the celebratory publications for the year of *Anne*'s centenary features exactly such blurring—but this mix of fact and fiction, though edited for publication by others, was actually created by Montgomery herself. A volume created from Montgomery's two Island Scrapbooks, Elizabeth Rollins Epperly's *Imagining Anne* (reviewed in this issue of *CCL/LCJ* by E. Holly Pike), has been published to mark the anniversary year, acknowledging a partnership between "the Lucy Maud Montgomery Birthplace Trust; the Heirs of L.M. Montgomery, Inc.; the Confederation Centre Art Gallery and Museum (CCAGM); and the L.M. Montgomery Institute (LMMI)" (170). Under this thoroughly institutionalized aegis, the edited scrapbook presents Montgomery's highly composed and reworked version of the matrix of real life from which *Anne of Green Gables* was drawn. Reproducing many pages from her first two scrapbooks (the first covers the years 1893–1897 with some later additions; the second includes 1896–1903, again with some late notes), the published volume displays a mix of photographs, souvenirs, wedding notices, newspaper clippings, fashion images, commercial products such as floral name cards, and assorted other "scraps." Anyone who is intrigued by Anne's yearnings for puffed sleeves can find real-world referents for Montgomery's own passion for fashion. Photos of the original Lover's Lane in Cavendish jostle with literary effusions such as a clipping of "The Fringed Gentian" by Ellen Rodham Church and Augusta DeBubna (128), the poem so influential in the life of Emily of New Moon. The scrapbooks read like a first pass at representing Cavendish life as a created chronotope. Montgomery reworked them over the course of her lifetime, removing some entries and pasting in others—just as she reworked the story of rural girlhood in Prince Edward Island over and over in her novels and short stories (see Waterston for numerous examples of such reworkings). To explore the scrapbooks after reading the novels is to observe an eerie space-time nexus that blends

a highly crafted record of regular daily life with matching fictional experiences. A sample quote from Epperly's comments on the entries on page 57 of the Blue Scrapbook may give some sense of the flavour:

> Rose Hartwick Thorpe's poem "Curfew Must Not Ring To-Night" [pasted on the scrapbook page opposite this account] was a favourite recitation piece. In Chapter 19 of *Anne of Green Gables*, Anne pleads with Marilla to let her go to a concert where fellow student Prissy Andrews will be reciting the thrilling poem. Two largish items on this page have been removed and replaced with pictures cut from magazines. (70)

Here we see Montgomery importing a poem that manifestly caught her attention in real life into the edges of her fictional world. We don't actually encounter the poem itself in the novel but we do read reports of it. In the removal and re-pasting, we can see Montgomery the reviser at work, crafting and re-crafting the images of her life-record.

Nowadays, however, it is clear that Montgomery is not the only reworker in these fields. Another anniversary publication appearing in 2008 is a prequel, *Before Green Gables* by Budge Wilson (reviewed in this issue of *CCL/LCJ* by Carole Gerson), which was enough of a national event that large sections were serialized in my daily newspaper in Edmonton. Wilson creates 443 pages of new life for Anne, all ending happily with her arrival in Bright River to be adopted by Matthew and Marilla. What is the status of this story? The dust jacket assures us that the book has been "fully authorized by the heirs of L.M. Montgomery," but does that imprimatur make it any more than hardcover fan fiction? Anne was created as a child whose background is riddled with gaps; will infilling those gaps with a new story change how we experience the old one?

I am normally fearless in exposing myself to adaptations and reworkings but I find myself strangely reluctant to start reading this book. What if I can't *un*-read it? What if *Anne of Green Gables* is seriously and permanently altered for me, through this new book's bricking-in of the gaps Montgomery purposely created in Anne's life history? I hesitate, even though I know that Montgomery herself was not averse to infilling, that *Anne of Windy Poplars* and *Anne of Ingleside* were written out of sequence in the *Anne* series, and that the timeline from *Anne of Green Gables* to *Rilla of Ingleside* cannot be drawn coherently. Does *Before Green Gables* feel different because I am too old-fashioned to believe in the death of the author after all? Complex questions of copyright,

trademark, and licensing, eagerly explained on the Maplelea website and in Wilson's book, do not translate into what some British copyright pages now describe as "the moral rights of the author," and nothing comes close to addressing any moral rights pertaining to readers. In this case, I choose to exercise my own readerly right to resist and put the book down.

Being a "classic" of children's literature today (at least one that is out of copyright) does seem to entail being open to evisceration, as publishers, producers, and manufacturers look for the nub of what made the work so popular in the first place and attempt to reproduce that appeal in ways that will sell anew. Books that appeal to girls and their mothers and grandmothers seem particularly vulnerable; veritable industries attend *The Secret Garden*, the *Little House* books, and others of that ilk. *Anne of Green Gables*, as one of a tiny number of Canadian children's classics, is often wrapped in the maple-leaf flag for extra consumer appeal. Alternatively, it is wrapped in a fuzzy blanket of nostalgia for the days of wholesome innocence, a chronotope as amorphous as it is didactic. The irony of requiring contemporary innocence to be vouched for by a fingerprint reader before young fans may enter the zone of virtue and purity that the world of *Anne of Green Gables* takes for granted is too disturbing to be entirely funny. The white picket fence that needs to be padlocked is an oxymoron of contemporary times and contemporary fears. Yet, even as the world of *Anne's Diary* is sealed off for safety, the setting of Avonlea appears to be more open for business than ever before. Is constant adaptation a surefire route to simplification, or is there something about Montgomery's own approach that lends itself to sentimentalization?

Part II

It was all much simpler when I was a girl. I realized with some stupefaction not long ago that I have been reading *Anne of Green Gables* for fifty of its hundred years. My copy had a plain blue cover and no illustrations. For me, for many years, the character of Anne of Green Gables existed only in black marks on a page; I had no externally supplied visuals for her at all.

Montgomery's books were almost the only Canadian literature I read as a child, and I felt particular bonds with Anne. In part, these links arose from the fact that *Anne of Green Gables* was my first Montgomery book. I galloped through the whole book in a single March day in 1958 when I was nine years old and sick in bed. By the end of the day, I knew I had irrevocably changed as a reader; a book that does that to you is one that you don't forget. It was the most complex book I

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had ever read; it evoked more real emotion than any other story I had known up to that point. And in a few small ways it actually made room for me, Margaret—born, like Anne, in Nova Scotia; like Anne, moving as a young child to a nearby island (though in my case it was to Newfoundland and I was a year old, too young to remember living elsewhere).

The pastoral blessings of Prince Edward Island that so haunted Montgomery resonated only partially for me on my bleaker, harsher island. Newfoundland is certainly beautiful, but not in the soft, gentle ways of PEI. The voices of the *Anne* books did not sound like my St. John's neighbours with their distinctive cadences—but they did sound like the Nova Scotia aunts and uncles and grandparents I saw on rare occasions. I wasn't a Presbyterian and had to ask my mother to explain predestination when it turned up in the later books—but I went to the United Church (a union of the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational Churches) and to a United-Church school in parochially organized Newfoundland; and I certainly recognized the church elders and Mrs. Rachel Lynde. Without a doubt, the world created by Montgomery resonated for me more vividly than that created by the author of any other book I read as a girl.

In some ways, the doll Jenna playing Anne of Green Gables in the school play provides an analogy for my relationship with Anne. I was tangentially connected, rather than completely identified, with Anne. I had to put on a costume to make it work: the garb of a little Nova Scotia girl. It was an identity that normally meant little to me, but the costume fit me and fit me into the story. I could make many effortless connections. I'm not sure this metaphor is sustainable, but it was as if I had found a door that would let me *into* the chronotope of Avonlea; in small but recognizable ways, I belonged there and knew how to read the space and time.

Another little girl read *Anne of Green Gables* for the first time when she was nine years old, and this child grew up to write very acutely about that experience. Adrienne Clarkson, who served as

Governor General of Canada between 1999 and 2005, arrived in Canada as an immigrant from Hong Kong at the age of six. Famously, she learned about Canada from *Anne of Green Gables*, and she has written eloquently of its power and appeal.

> L.M. Montgomery in all her books gave me a profound understanding of what Canada is. Through the particularity and peculiarities of Prince Edward Island and these girls' fictional lives, I became a Canadian . . . . L.M. Montgomery's world gave me an extended family that taught me about the rivalries of Tory and Grit, Protestant and Catholic, in a highly sophisticated microcosmic way; it was a background, a heritage that I gained literarily and that made my becoming Canadian very easy and attractive. Anne and Emily, the Story Girl, and all the others were my cousins of the imagination and the spirit, and so what they were I became also . . . .
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> [F]or me, the immigrant child, the world of the Cuthberts, the Lyndes, and the Barrys was the world of Canada—rural, rooted, and white—a world to which I would never have had access any other way . . . . [T]he depth of understanding, the texture of generations of feuds and forgettings, the nature of the Scots-Irish Presbyterianism, constituted a reality that only fiction could convey. Only fiction can bring the truth because only fiction is not unbelievable. (ix–x)

I was close to but not entirely inside the particularities of Anne's world; Perhaps Clarkson assumed those particularities as a different kind of costume—but one that seems to have fit equally well for her imaginative and national purposes. The chronotope Clarkson describes is a social setting—"rural, rooted, and white"—that has developed over time through a process of "feuds and forgettings."

What resources do child readers draw upon to help them make sense of these fictional worlds? My contiguity to this story was geographic and social; Clarkson's was more experiential and psychological:

> Being orphaned or losing a parent, which is such a Montgomery theme, was correlated in my mind to my experience as a refugee, arriving in Canada with my parents and one suitcase each. So when Anne is found by Matthew on the railway siding, sitting on her suitcase, to me that wasn't a fictional situation. That was my situation. And Matthew and Marilla were like the safe haven that Canada was for me. In many

> ways they represent Canadians at their most characteristic—repressed, silent, and strictured, but decent, open-hearted, and capable of adapting to circumstances. They were a traditional bachelor and spinster, and suddenly they became parents, they became loved by someone outside of their "family." If that isn't a metaphor for Canada as a country that receives immigrants, I don't know what is! (x)

As young readers, Clarkson and I were learning about reading a chronotope, among many other lessons. Drawing on our life experience and such literary knowledge as we then possessed, we established ways of observing the thickening of time and the charging of space, and made meaning of it for ourselves. The different emphases and recognitions that we brought to the book testify to the fact that the chronotope is never entirely of the author's making and never, therefore, a stable creation, even before the adaptors start having their way with a story. Readers vivify and solidify the "thickening" of the chronotope with their own understanding and experience. In Clarkson's case, she brought emotional understanding to underpin the way she learned about particularities of Canadian society; in my case, I applied my delighted recognition of the social world of Avonlea to ground the surprising realization that loved adults can die—something I registered for the first time on that March day in 1958 as I finished the book. Clarkson and I moved from opposite directions into this fictional world, but both recognition and new awareness awaited each of us when we entered Avonlea as readers.

The chronotope, while specific, is itself unstable, especially in a story based on real-world referents that can be consulted. It is, after all, created from one person's vision, which is necessarily partial. Clarkson's line about the feuds and forgettings sums up one of the major qualities of Montgomery's original stories, a quality that has been subverted for capitalistic purposes in some of the spin-off materials of the 21st century. Montgomery cast a sharp yet benevolent eye on the idiosyncrasies and peculiarities of the people she wanted to see, but she was also adept at *not seeing*, at omitting from the fabric of Island life any element that didn't fit her accounts of the insiders of village life. The French are permitted to make occasional appearances, usually as hired boys and usually to be denigrated as part of the price of appearing at all. Marilla, for example, explaining to Mrs. Lynde why they want to adopt a boy to help Matthew, says, "There's never anybody to be had but those stupid, half-grown little French boys" (58). The Mi'kmaq Nation has but one role: to donate the poetic name of Abegweit to the

Island and then to vanish from even the fringes of the story. The African Canadian people of Charlottetown, who inhabited the area known as the Bog during Montgomery's time, are not granted even that vestigial role in any of the stories. Consequently, *Anne of Green Gables* is a white fable of settlement and complacency.

Reading that white fable in Newfoundland in the late 1950s, I had no social experience with which to question the forgettings that help to shape Montgomery's chronotope of Avonlea. The Avalon Peninsula of that era, to all intents and purposes, was the all-white society of Montgomery's imagining. The Beothuk, Newfoundland's indigenous people, were wiped out in the nineteenth century and existed only vaguely in my consciousness in the twinned forms of history lessons at school and displays of skeletons and artifacts at the provincial museum. I have one strangely random memory from my early childhood of a black face underneath a turban suddenly looking out of a front door on Pennywell Road where I lived—but I have never been able to establish whether this astonishing event really happened or if I dreamed it with the aid of Aunt Jemima on the pancake box. In general, the faces I saw were exclusively white.

For many years, I had no reason to question the harmony between Montgomery's all-white world and my own. For many years after I moved away from Newfoundland, it must be admitted, I didn't even think very much about *Anne of Green Gables* at all, except, from time to time, to note the arrival of yet another adaptation. But a publishing event that occurred very close to the centennial celebrations for *Anne* gave me a new background for thinking about Montgomery's books. Like *Before Green Gables*, it provides some infilling of gaps in the background of *Anne of Green Gables*. Unlike Wilson's book, it sheds light on gaps in the story we are actively told, rather than on the blank pages of what happened before the story started. Unlike Wilson's book, it has no conscious connection to Montgomery's work; making such connections the work of readers. By throwing Montgomery's edits and absences into relief, this book highlights a new idea of Canada, and creates a different chronotope of an equivalent time and space in nineteenth-century Canada.

Elijah of Buxton by Christopher Paul Curtis was published in the fall of 2007, just a few months before *Anne*'s centenary. Like Anne, Elijah is eleven years old at the start of the book and is marked as special in his community. While Anne is an outsider to Avonlea, Elijah is a particularly special kind of insider in Buxton: the first free-born child in a community that consists entirely of escaped and freed slaves. Like Avonlea, Buxton is

firmly based on a real place, in Ontario, but Curtis does not go through the formality of changing the community's name as Montgomery did with Cavendish. Curtis has overlaid his story on a real village that already housed its own museum to testify to its historical significance, while the Green Gables industry in Prince Edward Island overlaid the museums on a fictional community—but the ontological fuzziness of the geography-fiction boundary is important in both cases.

Elijah of Buxton also tells a significant national story. The historical truths and mythologies of the Underground Railway to Canada are well established in Canadian culture, and Curtis's story certainly testifies to the role of Canada as sanctuary for African American escaped slaves and freed men and women. He supplies an account of daily life in a Canadian village that is in many ways very different from Avonlea; the adults of Buxton have been damaged by slavery in various ways. In both communities, however, the importance of bringing up children to be decent citizens is paramount and shines through on every page.

The historical documentation that surrounds Curtis's fiction also tells a very interesting story. Elijah talks about the day that the school children were organized by race to return home. Children were singled out by name and sent home in specific groups and Elijah comments, "I knowed there was only one reason why they'd let the white children and the Indian children leave without no one watching 'em. I said, 'Pa, there's slave catchers here, ain't there?'" (58). The integrated school implied in this scene is indeed a matter of historical record, as testified on the Buxton Museum website:

> In the words of John Scoble, secretary of the British and Foreign Anti-slavery Society: "I am not the advocate for exclusively coloured schools; I believe that one mode of breaking down the prejudice which exists against colour will be educating the children of all complexions together. An important fact came to my attention at Buxton which illustrates this point. At this interesting settlement an excellent school was opened by the Rev. Mr. King, at which superior education was imparted, and the result was that the white school in the neighborhood was given up, and the children transferred to the coloured school where I had the pleasure of seeing them distributed through the various classes, without distinction, and found that they studied harmoniously together." (Prince)

This interracial school offers a very different scenario from the white world of Montgomery's

It may well be that Anne's world is so open to capitalist reconfiguration precisely *because* it was more selectively rooted in its own time and space than I had previously considered.

Prince Edward Island—but I was fascinated to discover that Montgomery might have drawn on a similar example of integrated education right in her own territory. Anne went to Queen's in Charlottetown and studied to be a teacher, indeed set her heart on being a progressive teacher; but she paid no heed to a progressive example from the Bog, the black neighbourhood inside the boundaries of Charlottetown:

> In the Bog, on Rochford Street, was an integrated school for the underprivileged. On Prince Edward Island in the 19th century, the gulf between the rich and the lower classes was enormous. Nowhere was this more obvious than in the Bog area of Charlottetown where many Black Islanders lived. For over fifty years in the Bog School (1848–1903) Sarah Harvie, [sic] trained more than two thousand children. Sarah, who was African Canadian, was highly respected for the positive influence she exerted on the locality . . . . Some protested the fact that children of "respectable parents" were sending their children to Sarah Harvie to benefit from her progressive teaching. (Flynn-Burhoe)

"Queen's" is the name Montgomery gave to Prince of Wales College in Charlottetown, which she herself had attended. By one of those accidents of colonial nomenclature, my own school in St. John's, which I attended until I was 13, was also Prince of Wales College, another of those subliminal links. From the windows of my own PWC, I looked down the hill to the harbour, over streets full of white residents. It was not until I read *Elijah of Buxton* that it occurred to me even to *wonder* if Charlottetown was quite so monolithic. It took just moments on the Internet to establish the existence of the Bog, raising the question of whether Montgomery was herself ignorant of its existence or whether she chose (actively or subconsciously) to bleach her story of any non-white ingredients.

Whatever the case, my reading of *Anne of*

Green Gables has irrevocably altered in spite of my precautions in avoiding Budge Wilson's book. I now see gaps that I never noticed before. For all the persuasive invocation of the details of Avonlea life, the chronotope is selective. However we may excoriate the sanitized commodification of *Anne's Diary*, the doll Jenna's role-play, and Kevin Sullivan's saccharine clean-up of Avonlea, the first bucket of whitewash was supplied by Montgomery herself. Indeed, it may well be that Anne's world is so open to capitalist reconfiguration precisely *because* it was more selectively rooted in its own time and space than I had previously considered.

Yet to say that Montgomery turned her back on the multicultural world that was flourishing in her own backyard is not to discredit everything she created in terms of a national story. Neither Curtis nor Montgomery shies away from challenging young readers emotionally. Curtis brings the treacherous Preacher into Buxton, but the most harrowing scenes in the book, involving the escaped slaves, take place outside of Buxton and indeed outside of Canada. Canada represents safety; the American baby who is rescued from slavery in the latter part of the book will live a relatively secure life once she reaches Buxton, however precariously that community survives. At Green Gables, however, no barrier is sufficient to create safety. The shock of a bank failure kills Matthew within sight of his own back door, and Green Gables can be preserved for Marilla (and for distraught readers) only through Anne's willingness to sacrifice her cherished plans for attending university.

The contrast between the two heroes is instructive. Anne was an outsider who knew she was an outsider. Elijah was a "special" insider, but, paradoxically, his status as freeborn made him an "outsider" to the shared experiences of most of the rest of his community. It is clear from the story that he truly did not understand the experience of slavery until he snuck into the United States—but that experience marked all of the adults in his community in ways that he could not comprehend, and he knew it was his lack of this history that marked him as different.

My own experience was not so traumatic, but it was distinctive. In real life, as a child reader, I was an outside observer of a particular and unique confluence of time and space in my own class at school. My classmates, born in 1948, represented the last cohort of native Newfoundlanders; the children in the class behind us were born, after Confederation, as Canadians. I, too, was a Canadian, of course, and my classmates, who were fiercely proud of their own place in history, perceived my outsider status. When I moved to Edmonton at the age of thirteen, I was still

an outsider; the paths between Newfoundland and Alberta were nowhere near so well-trodden in 1962, and Newfoundlanders were rare in Edmonton.

In more complex ways, what I learned about my country from reading *Anne of Green Gables* placed me more in Elijah's state, as an insider who knew too little of the community (in this case, Canada) to which she belonged. The lacunae in Montgomery's work helped to shape my social and cultural perceptions of my homeland as a place entirely composed of people who looked like me. I knew and saw nothing of the African Canadian communities of Nova Scotia or of the members of the First and Métis Nations in Alberta, even though I had connections to both provinces. Such obliviousness was widespread in the 1950s and 1960s, and Montgomery is not the only author whose works created an all-white Canadian world.

It is disturbing, however, in the 21st century, to turn to the commodified versions of *Anne* and find them also largely monocultural. *Anne's Diary* is heavy into pink, with red-haired Anne the only face on offer. The Maplelea dolls offer a sop to multiculturalism; one doll, Alexi, is vaguely coffee-coloured. But Alexi's identity is blandly urban (she lives in trendy Toronto!), and she is as shallow and fashion-obsessed as any other character in this world. The didactic stereotypes that inhabit Kevin Sullivan's "educational" *Annetoon* website, linked to his animations, are all-white and relentlessly boring; for example, the "activities" associated with the head-lice cartoon involve talking about communicable diseases and cleaning up the classroom toys ("One True Friend: Episode #7"). There are many children who will be as excluded from the worlds created by these revisions of *Anne* as they would be from the original Avonlea.

Montgomery's sins against plurality—conscious or otherwise—in creating the fictional universe of Avonlea reflect the wilful blindness of her own time. The inexorable evacuation of meaning and interest from her creation as it mutates into commercial products is a signature of our own time—though it is relatively unusual for contemporary capitalism to stray quite so far from the fields of inclusiveness as the examples I have inspected here.

Fifty years ago, reading as a child who lived in a historically white city, I did not perceive any reductiveness in the world created for Anne by her author. Today, however, the very partial chronotopes created by the pallid websites of *Anne's Diary*, the Maplelea dolls' accessory shopping site, and *Annetoon* offer an even more limited vision of the world, uninflected by Montgomery's many subtle social observations and remote from the lived worlds of many Canadian

children.

But the antidote to this ongoing evisceration of an already edited world is not to abandon *Anne of Green Gables* as historically suspect, or as commercially polluted beyond redemption. Christine Jenkins, addressing the National Reading Conference (Wolf *et al*.), spoke of the power of placing books side by side and considering how they talk to each other. When *Anne of Green Gables* and *Elijah of Buxton* are placed together, a new, broader, and more exciting chronotope of nineteenth-century Canada emerges. The repressed Presbyterians of Avonlea provide interesting ground when Elijah serves as figure; the background of Buxton throws the principles of localized decency and kindness that govern Avonlea life into high relief. For a child reader to learn that the country that produced Avonlea could also support, or at least tolerate, Buxton to the extent of making room for it—and that the country that sheltered Buxton also gave rise to the contradictions of Avonlea—is educational in the best sense of the word.

I will give the last word to Margaret the reader. I have completely lost track of how many times I have read *Anne of Green Gables* in the past fifty years—enough times that I thought the book had few surprises to offer me. Reading *Elijah of Buxton* sent me back to *Anne of Green Gables* with revitalized eyes. The simple act of finding out about the multicultural elements of Charlottetown in the nineteenth century has estranged and refreshed a text that I was close to being able to recite, and given me a new sense of Canada as a home for the plural, however much its national icon attempts to render it singular. Read separately, both Avonlea and Buxton are romanticized in these children's stories, but, set side by side, they query each other in instructive ways and open the door to new ways of critical reading for both children and adults. Laid alongside the newer versions of Anne, the richness and complexity of the original books is immediately apparent, creating a dense back story for the chronotopes of the adaptations, which are thin and sentimental when taken alone. The newer renditions play their part in drawing Anne into very contemporary dynamics of ontological flux and pluralism, keeping her lively and current in the minds and hearts of today's readers. Such multiplicity keeps the chronotope of Avonlea vigorous and open, as opposed to a fossil record of times gone by, and places Anne's story in a context where many different readers may encounter, enjoy, and interrogate it.

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