

*Making Avonlea: L.M. Montgomery and Popular Culture*. Ed. Irene Gammel. U of Toronto P, 2002. xiv+347 pp. \$70.00 cloth, \$27.50 paper. ISBN 0-8020-3558-2, 0-8020-8433-8.

A book about the popular industry that has sprung up around the name of L.M. Montgomery is certainly a book whose time has come. Irene Gammel's collection of essays *Making Avonlea: L.M. Montgomery and Popular Culture* is an important addition to Montgomery studies. Until recently, this field has been focused primarily on Montgomery's texts, neglecting to some degree other manifestations of the popular author's works. Gammel's anthology is therefore significant because it redresses the situation as the first book of its kind to reflect on the spin-off industries (e.g., films, tourism, merchandise) that have emanated from Montgomery's source texts. While more is being published on the Montgomery spin-offs, this is the first time such work is collected in one book. Except for three reprinted essays, *Making Avonlea* contains new and original material.

The first section, "Mapping Avonlea," is less cohesive than the other two sections, but it nonetheless includes some noteworthy contributions to Montgomery scholarship. At the top of the list — and kicking off the section for good reason — is Carole Gerson's well-researched and observant history of Montgomery studies within Canada. Gerson's work indicates that scholarship here has reached a point in its history when it can begin to reflect on itself as a field of inquiry. Also in this section, Andrea McKenzie traverses new ground in cross-cultural studies of the Canadian author. Analyzing international book covers of the *Emily* trilogy at different historical moments, McKenzie demonstrates the extent to which the meaning of Montgomery's heroine is inextricably bound to the national cultures in which the books were made and distributed.

Of special note is Gammel's own contribution, which pushes the boundaries of Montgomery scholarship in boldly linking the popularity of Montgomery's books to that author's use of erotic language in her nature descriptions as well as in her descriptions of female friendship and of the creative process. By posing the question of what exactly is the intensity of feeling Montgomery inspires, Gammel opens the door to further much-needed study of affect as it relates to the reception of Montgomery's creations.

The second section, "Viewing Avonlea," is devoted to adaptation and examines the pivotal role context plays in interpreting Montgomery's texts for stage and screen. All the articles, save for one by K.L. Poe, depart from fidelity criticism (judging the adaptation according to the degree to which it adheres to or veers from its source text). This departure is welcome because studies of adaptation — specifically, the cultural transformation of source texts over time — teach us about the role interpretation plays in securing Montgomery's continuing popularity and remarkable longevity. Consequently, these articles make a worthwhile contribution to the scholarly aims of this compendium.

Previous to this collection, analyses of Sullivan Entertainment's Anne films have followed the line of argument whereby the (liberal) feminism of the adaptation is dependent upon the degree to which the film adheres to or departs from the source text. *Making Avonlea* continues this debate. Eleanor Hersey and Ann F. Howey demonstrate that the Sullivan films' concerns around Anne's career "are not im-

posing modern ideals that are completely foreign to Montgomery's context" (Howey 169); they are present in Montgomery's writing, particularly her journals, which have come to function as key intertexts informing later Sullivan adaptations. At the same time, they both argue that the adaptations invoke a contemporary Western-feminist sensibility, updating Anne as a modern woman, successful at both career and heterosexual romance.

Studies of Montgomery television adaptations, like those above, tend to focus on the social history of gender as the determining factor in interpreting source texts for contemporary viewers to the exclusion of other factors such as the business of television itself. For this reason, Christopher Gittings's inclusion in this volume, via an article about the television series *Emily of New Moon* previously published in *Canadian Children's Literature* in 1998, is important. Gittings situates the Emily adaptation within the unique political economy of television production in Canada, arguing that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's involvement in the series as a producer has a significant bearing on content. Specifically, the CBC's status as the nation's public broadcaster, along with Canada's official policy of multiculturalism, contributes to the series' attempts to "narrate the nation" (194) away from the Anglo-Celtic Protestant normativity constructed in Montgomery's novel towards two founding cultures (English, French) and a first nation (Micmac). Gittings' innovative discussion of the interplay between production context, public policy and social history pulls adaptation studies of Montgomery onto new terrain.

Also in this section are Benjamin Lefebvre's essay on *Road to Avonlea* as a co-production with the Disney Channel and George Belliveau's and Carrie MacLellan's insightful work on the adaptation of *Anne of Green Gables* to the stage. By and large, the section on adaptation shows that Montgomery's texts are popular because they are dynamic (responsive to the needs of the historical moment) and polysemic (carrying multiple meanings). When it comes to the kinds of questions Gammel sets out to answer in this anthology, fidelity criticism represents a dead end, so it is not surprising to find it underrepresented as an approach. However, I do agree with Poe's concern that making Anne into a late-twentieth-century liberal-feminist role model perpetuates a kind of historical amnesia with respect to women's past struggles. But I also think that arguing for adaptations that are truer to the source text or more historically accurate ignores the economic realities of television production, particularly in Canada.

The general lack of research on the economics of television adaptation within Montgomery studies is made up for in the third section, "Touring Avonlea," which deals mostly with the commodification of Montgomery in tourism and spin-off products. Janice Fiamengo and Jeannette Lynes make similar arguments regarding the cross-cultural portability of Avonlea as a nonspecific place that signifies home and belonging. Their discussions contribute to the ongoing project of understanding Montgomery's transcultural and transhistorical popularity and her immensely successful commodification in our time and in hers.

Along these lines, E. Holly Pike and James De Jonge discuss the idealization of time and place that occurs in imagining Montgomery's Cavendish birthplace. Pike analyzes reviews and articles written about Montgomery throughout her career to show that the appeal of Avonlea is its "removal from the real world and wholeness that are [also] part of the sacralization of Montgomery and her works" (248). De Jonge, an historian for Parks Canada who worked on evaluating PEI sites associated with Montgomery, examines the challenges of encouraging reflection

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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*Patsy Kotsopoulos is completing her doctoral thesis, **Romance and Industry on the Road to Avonlea**, for the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University. She has written about L.M. Montgomery and television adaptation for **Essays on Canadian Writing and Pop Can: Popular Culture in Canada** (Prentice-Hall Canada).*

### **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 DuChescher. Canada, 23 min., 2002.