

Consumable Avonlea: The Commodification of the Green Gables Mythology

• Jeanette Lynes •

Résumé: L'oeuvre de L.M. Montgomery est à l'origine de formes d'expression artistique ressortissant à la culture populaire, particulièrement dans les domaines du tourisme, du spectacle et de la production de souvenirs destinés au commerce. Ces objets entretiennent des rapports intertextuels complexes et contradictoires. L'article de Jeanette Lynes analyse trois constantes de ces "produits dérivés": la nostalgie et l'idéalisation de la société campagnarde; la compétitivité dans la recherche de l'"authenticité"; et, enfin, les choix iconographiques et leur orientation idéologique.

Summary: The popular culture industry predicated on L.M. Montgomery's literary legacy encompasses tourism, entertainment and a wide range of artifacts for consumer purchase. These areas comprise the essence of popular culture delineated by Dominic Strinati as "a range of artifacts and social processes." Popular culture, according to John Fiske, is intertextual and shot through with contradictions. This paper examines how the marketers of the Green Gables mythology create intertextuality by contextualizing Anne products within the broader phenomenon of "countrification" — a consumer movement marketing what Raymond Williams calls a "residual culture" from an earlier era. The paper examines as well the territorial competition for "authenticity" with respect to Anne products. Finally, the paper explores the selective iconography articulated in Green Gables marketing: in other words, which images are privileged and possible reasons why.

The literary legacy of Lucy Maud Montgomery has moved in two directions. On the one hand, due largely to the efforts of feminist scholars, Montgomery's work has become a legitimate subject of study in the academy (see Rubio and Waterston; Rubio; Epperly, Drain, Robinson, Gerson, and a host of others). On the other hand, Montgomery's legacy exerts a strong presence in the realm of popular culture — a realm which encompasses tourism, entertainment, and consumable artifacts. The consumable articulation of the



Figure One
Cover design by Stanley Turner for the 1937
McClelland & Stewart edition of *Jane of Lantern Hill*

Green Gables mythology is of an intensely aestheticized, sentimentalized, and intertextual nature.

This paper attempts to mediate between these two areas by premising itself on what Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson identify as “the legitimation of contemporary popular culture as a subject for study in universities and a subject of inquiry for serious scholars” (3). As early as 1961, Leo Lowenthal suggested that literary art and “market-oriented commodities” (xii) may not occupy as separate realms as we might think (xii). The movement of popular culture studies from “an academic backwater” to “a swift intellectual [interdisciplinary] river” (Mukerji and Schudson 1) might resonate for anyone who has worked in the areas of women’s literature, children’s literature, “ethnic minority writing” (Gunew 53), or even Canadian literature. Like popular culture studies, these areas have had to struggle for legitimation within the academy. In a 1987 article in *Signal*, Lissa Paul observed that “[b]oth women’s literature and children’s literature are devalued and regarded as marginal or peripheral by the literary and educational communities,” although she noted, too, that “[f]eminist critics are beginning to change that” (149). Canadian literature, too, has had to struggle for legitimation in English departments where curricula were typically built up around the British tradition.

Since the marginalization of women’s writing, children’s literature and Canadian literature within the academy has been, I want to suggest

cautiously, partially overcome, I do not bring up the above points out of defensiveness, but rather to posit a space of rich intersection between the comprehensive entity known as “popular culture” and one of Canada’s best-known women writers and children’s authors, Lucy Maud Montgomery. Although I suspect that studying popular culture expressions of Montgomery’s work has few new insights to offer on the work itself, I believe it nevertheless articulates, in meaningful ways, messages about desire in contemporary consumer culture. The discussion that follows does not pretend to decode all these messages; it offers only a starting point, and as such, it excludes a considerable amount — the televised and theatrical adaptations of Montgomery, for example — in order to examine several strategies used in marketing the Green Gables mythology within the larger context of contemporary consumer society.



Figure Two
 Website banner, © Anne of Green Gables Store, Charlottetown, PEI,
<http://www.peionline.com/anne/>

Popular culture is not static. It refers, Mukerji and Schudson tell us, “to the beliefs and practices, and the objects through which they are organized, that are widely shared among a population” (3). Strinati’s description of popular culture as “a range of artifacts and social processes” (xvii) is similar. Presumably, these beliefs, practices and processes do not remain constant, but undergo transformations and revisions. That is why, for example, Stanley Turner’s cover design for the 1937 McClelland and Stewart edition of Montgomery’s *Jane of Lantern Hill* (see figure one) looks dated to us now, a period piece, an artifact. In their popular culture manifestations, Montgomery’s heroines continue to be revised in ways that harmonize with their respective societal contexts. The Megan Followsian Anne on the *Green Gables Store* internet site (see figure two) could have just stepped out of a Laura Ashley store. Her image embodies paradox, being a collision of past and present, stasis and the flux of fashion. In terms of the “social processes” referred to by Strinati, the Japanese wedding ceremonies held on Prince Edward Island probably represent an example of popular culture as “social process,” as would tourist pilgrimages to Cavendish.

John Fiske contends that “popular culture is shot through with contradictions” (105). One contradictory aspect of the Avonlea mythology is

that it is at once regional — grounded in a specific locale — yet highly mobile or portable. For example, during a recent stroll through an upscale Seattle neighbourhood, I discovered a bed and breakfast called Green Gables. The Canadiana souvenirs in airport shops throughout Canada sometimes include Anne memorabilia. Shops in Banff, Alberta, sell Anne dolls, no doubt aware of the attachment Japanese tourists might have for these products. Anne smiles out from the licence plates of PEI cars moving down the road. Even for those who never leave their armchairs, Avonlea has exerted its presence through the “Road to Avonlea” televised series. And now, internet surfers, with a few clicks of their mice, can spend Christmas with Anne, or order Green Gables products from sites such as *The Anne of Green Gables Store* or the *Canadian Living Marketplace*. Anne has entered the virtual marketplace; if you can’t go to her, she’ll come to you — provided you can afford a modem hook-up.

Avonlea, it seems, is everywhere. At least, it seems to have become a floating signifier. Perhaps the recent internet marketing of Anne has helped “de-regionalize” her, pushing her into more of a virtual, than a regional, space, and in this sense has decontextualized her (notwithstanding the regionally-specific name of the web site, “peionline”). Not all of my Canadian Studies students in Seattle¹ knew where the novel *Anne of Green Gables* was set, even though they were all quite familiar with Montgomery and had read her novels as children. They were also aware of the popular mythology predicated on Montgomery’s work, including the *Road to Avonlea* televised series. The regional signified (PEI) as a referent seemed to be of minimal importance to them.

The varying degrees of indifference, on the part of my students, towards the importance of place in *Anne of Green Gables* suggests to me that the commodifiers of the Avonlea mythology allow for, indeed, engineer as part of their marketing tactics, a certain amount of slippage. It is clearly in the interests of those who manufacture Avonlea products to expand their thematic range and thus, profit range, as much as possible. In the course of this expansion, Avonlea products can become diluted, to say the least. For example, the Cavendish Shopping Centre in PEI sells a video called “The Witches of Avonlea” priced at \$17.00. Another way of accounting for such slippage or dilution is to follow John Fiske’s notion that popular culture is intertextual (124), that its meanings “circulate intertextually” through “primary texts (the original cultural commodities) ... secondary texts that refer to them directly (advertisements, press stories ...), and tertiary texts that are in constant process in everyday life (conversation, the ways of wearing jeans ... window shopping ...)” (124). What Fiske refers to as “tertiary texts” seem to carry with them an element of mimicry; window shopping mimics shopping. Wearing jeans mimics some rustic concept of America (individuality within conformity?). What the commodified Green Gables mythology might be seen to be mimicking will be discussed below.

The commodification of Avonlea exploits all three levels of textual meaning in popular culture, as defined by Fiske. The textual categories, however, may overlap more than Fiske's original delineation of them when we consider consumable Avonlea. The production of Anne books on CD ROM reflects a reconstitution of primary texts, for example — a kind of at-once primary and secondary text. Avonlea spin-off products like aprons, bibs and preserves which are now for sale in the virtual Green Gables Store as well as the original one, exemplify tertiary texts. The internet store is itself a tertiary text, in a sense. Perhaps tourism, too, the middle-class ritual of the family vacation, is a kind of tertiary text, carried out in everyday life and mimicking a familial ideal.

Countrification and "Residual Culture"

One explanation for the considerable success of Green Gables artifacts may be their built-in intertextuality, the interface of Green Gables products with the broader consumer movement of countrification or rural elitism. This movement is reflected, in part, through the phenomenon of the country store and country living — a phenomenon which is, of course, quite urban in conception. Most "country stores" are in, or within driving distance of, urban centres. In other words, Green Gables merchandising is framed by a broader milieu of consumer fantasy fostered and disseminated through store merchandise, catalogues, and magazines such as *Country Living*, *Martha Stewart Living*, *Victoria Magazine*, the Eddie Bauer home collection, the Ralph Lauren home collection, Laura Ashley, La Cache, Crabtree and Evelyn, and to some extent (although with a more rugged spin), L.L. Bean. This does not even take into account all the clones of the above. What these consumer outlets share is an upper-end price range and a decorative extravagance; these products are primarily for urbanites who are comfortable in their material surroundings and likely employed in some fairly lucrative profession. They are products for people with homes, which sets these consumers at a considerable thematic distance, if not a diametrically opposed position, from the homeless little girl in her plain dress waiting to be rescued at Bright River Station. Why is it that every culture seems to desire its opposite? Fiske's notion of the contradictory articulations of popular culture is highly appropriate when applied to the commodification of Avonlea.

The Anne of Green Gables Store and Avonlea Traditions Inc.

By inserting their products, through visual associations, within a broader movement of rural elitism, Avonlea producers are really marketing what Raymond Williams calls a "residual culture" which promotes "experiences, meanings and values, which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture [but] which are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue — cultural as well as social — of some



Figure Three
Anne of Green Gables Store, Charlottetown

previous social formation" (415). To illustrate a "residual culture," Williams uses the example of the "very significant popularity," in Britain, "of certain notions derived from a rural past" (415). Williams emphasizes the point that although "a residual culture is usually at some distance from the effective dominant culture ... it may get incorporated into it" (415-6). British tourism's appropriation of Kenneth Grahame's pastoral world of *The Wind in The Willows* to promote travel to the English countryside seems exemplary of Williams's notion of "residual culture." In North America, the recent phe-

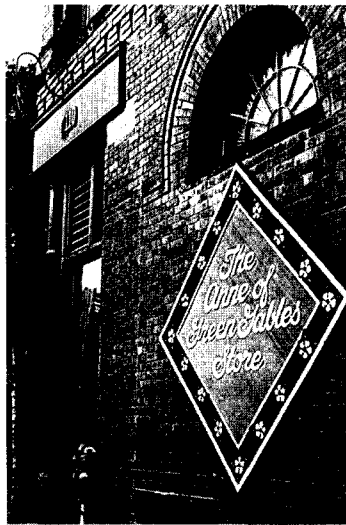


Figure Four
Anne of Green Gables Store, Charlottetown

nomenon of the “country store” — the consumer category in which Charlottetown’s Anne of Green Gables Store belongs — would also seem to exemplify “residual culture,” hearkening back, as it does, to an earlier time. Some “country stores” are actually situated in upscale urban malls which clearly denotes their participation in dominant consumer culture. What the Green Gables Store and other “country stores” are mimicking is the past — a sentimentalized, feminized version of it.

When I entered the Anne of Green Gables Store in Charlottetown for the first time a year ago,² I experienced a sense of *déjà vu*, a strong feeling that I had been in such a store before. This *déjà vu*, I believe, had less to do with the Montgomery novels I had read and the worlds depicted therein than it did with a deliberate intertextuality the Anne Store has established with the country store genre. Owned by Henderson and Cudmore, the Anne of Green Gables Store is located on the main level of a handsome red brick building at the corner of Richmond and Queen in Charlottetown — as the Charlottetown Festival calendar for 1997 tells us, “next to Confederation Centre.” There is a great deal of associative marketing going on; obviously, the idea is to combine nationalism with the purchase of some memories. The setting and design of the store — with its simulated handwritten sign — achieve a high degree of visual appeal (see figures three and four). The store’s rich green exterior wood trim and overall presentation are not unlike the Laura Ashley chain of retail outlets.

The intent of the Anne Store owners seems to be to have it both ways: to project the image of an entirely unique place (there is, as far as I know, only one Anne of Green Gables store) but to insert the store into the larger text of countrification. Countrification, in turn, with its vaguely folkloric aspirations and its emphasis on “authentic” handcrafted productions and naive art (much of which, paradoxically, is mass-produced) hearkens back to some nebulous “folk” era which is, according to Ian McKay, “part of a much bigger movement of aesthetic colonization of the country by the city” (9). The Anne store seems to have created a ripple effect (and more intertextuality) in Charlottetown’s downtown area; “authentic” wood carvings and country crafts are sold in a number of nearby stores and galleries. “The Two Sisters” store nearby, for example, resembles the Anne store in design (see figure five). Given that the “Sisters” ad in the 1997 “official guide to Charlottetown” is printed in English and Japanese, the “Sisters,” specializing in “country and Victorian crafts and gifts” as well as “nostalgic treasures from Anne’s land,” clearly has the Anne Store clientele in mind. Reflecting its dependance upon tourists, the Anne store is open from the beginning of May to the end of December. I visited it in November, 1997, around 5 pm, and it was full of shoppers.

The Anne Store is decidedly *not* a bookstore; it is, as signs on either side of the front door tell us, a “gift emporium” and place of “fond memo-



Figure Five
Ad for The Two Sisters Store, Charlottetown

ries" (see figure six). The "Anne merchandise" is supplemented by the kind of products one would find in any country store: wooden figurines, pewter frames, jewellery, maple syrup, pottery made by local potters. No doubt this supplementation helps contextualize the Anne Store within the country store genre. All products are displayed, for the most part, in appealing, carefully-designed spaces. The store's interior is predominantly glass and wood, in-



Figure Six
Entrance, The Anne of Green Gables Store,
Charlottetown

cluding hardwood floors, creating, for the most part, a feeling of warmth. Musak-type music was playing. Surprisingly few books were for sale: the store featured only a couple of modest-sized book shelves, and these were not predominantly displayed. The books included recipe books, paperback copies of most of Montgomery's books as well as a small group of critical works on Montgomery and a few first edition "collector" books. The book, *Your Guide to Finding Anne*, a small, spiral-bound book published by Ragweed Press, sold for \$12.00. Video tapes of *The Road to Avonlea* series and the "officially authorized" CD ROM of *Anne of Green Gables* were more prominently displayed than the books. The video, "My Island Home" (presumably containing biographical information on Montgomery) sold for \$30.00. The CD ROM "interactive storybook" was priced at \$34.99. The majority of the store's merchandise fell into the "secondary" and "tertiary" groups, to recall Fiske's categories, and a good deal of it could be classified as pure ephemera.

The store's products specifically based on Anne could be classified into hard-core and soft-core merchandise. Much of the latter is not necessarily that closely related to the Anne books; it may, rather, make some broader regional allusion such as the lupine fridge magnets, key chains containing some Atlantic motif, sun-catchers or maple syrup. The store also sold soap, body lotion and cologne which do not make any direct reference to Anne, but which refer to the kind of country store merchandise sold in Crabtree and Evelyn stores. Other ephemeral items were tangentially related to Anne by virtue of containing some kind of Anne-ish logo. These products do not have ephemeral prices, though. A wristwatch with a silhouette of Anne's profile on its face cost \$54.99. On the lower end of the price spectrum, Anne buttons, calendars, mouse pads, Green Gables tea and preserves were for sale. Clearly, the store endeavours to make shopping there a sensory experience; there are colognes for sampling, as well as preserves. A 250 ml jar of preserves with a Green Gables label was \$5.99. The store also offered Green Gables address books, stationary, and diaries, among the few objects which imply writing. Anne of Green Gables posters sold for \$20. T-shirts featuring various Green Gables images were approximately the same price, although children's sizes cost less. Jigsaw puzzles with Green Gables images and press-out activity books were at the lower end of the price spectrum (under \$20).

The store's hard-core "Anne" merchandise consists of dolls and plates. These items have higher prices and greater claims to authenticity. There is something of a contest for authenticity among these products, the dolls in particular. Anne dolls come with various claims of specialness or authenticity. A "special edition" porcelain doll sells for \$29.99 and the tag claims that these "special" dolls are "produced by the Green Gables store" and sold "in limited quantities." *The Canadian Living Marketplace* link of the Green Gables Store internet site sells "A Canadian Heroine," an Anne doll created "by New Brunswick artist Catherine Karnes Munn." This doll, too, comes with a "certificate of authenticity," and claims to be produced in a



A Canadian Heroine



Celebrate L.M. Montgomery's beloved Anne of Green Gables with the creations of New Brunswick artist Catherine Karnes Munn. Her "Anne" doll is made of porcelain and comes dressed in a pretty cotton dress and jaunty straw hat. She stands 41 cm (16 in) high and comes with wooden box, doll stand, and certificate of authenticity. This beautiful doll is being produced in a limited edition of 1,000.

Anne of Green Gables Doll #3693 \$69.99

Order

Figure Seven

"Anne" doll by New Brunswick artist Catherine Karnes Munn

"limited edition of 1,000." The Munn doll costs \$69.99 (see figure seven). Some dolls sold in the store (and presumably other stores) are trademarks of Avonlea Traditions Inc. These dolls, too, claim to be authentic.

The company, Avonlea Traditions Inc., epitomizes the commodification of the Montgomery legacy. Located in Newmarket, Ontario, Avonlea Traditions is owned by forty-two year old Kathryn Gallagher Morton who was touted in *Chatelaine* as a leading-edge business woman and "character builder." As *Chatelaine* tells us, "Avonlea Traditions produces more than 100 products ranging from dolls to fridge magnets. Manufactured by small firms and independent craftspeople, items sell mainly through upscale gift shops to preserve Anne's homespun image. The formula seems to be working: 1994 sales of \$1.3 million made Avonlea one of *Profit Magazine's* 100 fastest growing companies" ("Avonlea Traditions" 44). Gallagher Morton is tapping into the mail order market as well, and consumers can receive an *Anne of Green Gables Catalogue* for \$3.00 (see figure eight). The *Chatelaine* piece mentions as well Gallagher Morton's \$100,000 legal battle against "unauthorized products" and the conflict which arose when "Prince Edward Island claimed the rights to Anne." The fact that she was prepared to go to those lengths reflects her recognition of the profit potential of Avonlea products.

The territorial competition for "authorized," "authentic" Anne products resonates more broadly with the emphasis on trademarking in the toy industry. Every child wants a *real* Tickle-Me-Elmo, not a knock-off: a real Barbie, not a pretender. The most fully realized expression of trademark marketing is surely that of Disney products: Lion Kings, Little Mermaids,

Mickey Mice, and so on. The potential for cloning seems to be greater with less established products. The recent phenomenon of "Beanie Babies" serves as an example; the "real" or original Beanie Babies were trademarked by Ty, Inc, of Oakbrook, Illinois, but a rash of Beanie clones quickly appeared. This may be because Beanies are relatively easier to make than, say, convincing-looking Barbie dolls. The Beanies are also more diverse, whereas Barbie presents a more singular and static image (despite her alleged "updates").

What are we to make of the competing claims of authenticity with respect to Anne dolls, given that dolls made in different places all claim to be "authentic"? One dictionary definition of "authentic" is "of undisputed origin." In other words, the doll must come from a recognizable source; but a source only becomes recognizable through repetition, and repetition comes about through mass production. Disney products exemplify this notion of "authenticity"; we can recognize "authentic" Disney products because we have seen them so frequently before. Also, because their trademarks are stamped on them in some visible way, we know that product is "of undisputed origin," thus an original Disney product. Gallagher Morton of Avonlea Traditions Inc. no doubt hopes that her products will become so familiar, recognizable, and pervasive in the marketplace that any competing claims for "authentic" Anne products will not get very far. Although successful, her products have not yet reached that stage; that is why there is still contestation and ambiguity around Anne products in a way that there is not around Disney products. The corporatization of authenticity does not admit difference, otherness, or multiplicity of origin. What does our desire to buy "au-

A catalogue of Anne of Green Gables gifts, books and collectibles!

Over 260 items pertaining to Anne of Green Gables and L. M. Montgomery. Dolls and accessories, craft kits, collectibles, toiletries, stationery, teas, paper dolls, slate, rubber stamps, posters, gardening seeds, clothing, music, videos, diaries and lots of books. Please or write to the address on the back. Cost is \$3.00 (refundable with first order). Or, subscribe to the *Avonlea Traditions Chronicle* and receive a complimentary copy of the catalogue.



The Avonlea Traditions Chronicle

For those who want to share the pleasure of what is happening in the world of Anne of Green Gables and L. M. Montgomery, the *Avonlea Traditions Chronicle* is the most sensible and comprehensive way to stay in touch. Each issue is chock full of news and views, activities, events, contests, trivia, pen friends, readers' submissions, new products and the answers to your questions. Includes complimentary catalogue and updates.

Name: _____		Tel: (____) _____	
Address: _____		Date order placed: _____ 19__	
Zip/Postal Code _____		Method of payment:	
Send to: Avonlea Traditions Inc. #12-17075 Leslie Street, Newmarket, Ontario, Canada L3Y 8E1 or call 1-800-888-4330		<input type="checkbox"/> Cheque/money order enclosed. <input type="checkbox"/> VISA/MC, Expiry date: _____ 19__	
Avonlea Traditions Chronicle Canadian and U.S. rates:		Signature: _____	
<input type="checkbox"/> \$16 for 4 issues <input type="checkbox"/> \$26 for 8 issues <input type="checkbox"/> \$35 for 12 issues Overseas rates: <input type="checkbox"/> \$21 for 4 issues <input type="checkbox"/> \$34 for 8 issues <input type="checkbox"/> \$44 for 12 issues		Canadian and Overseas subscribers pay in Canadian dollars. US subscribers please pay in US dollars. USA subscribers please put sufficient postage on your letter to avoid delays! Back issues available: \$3.50/issue <input type="checkbox"/> Issue #1 <input type="checkbox"/> Issue #2 <input type="checkbox"/> Issue #3 <input type="checkbox"/> Issue #4 <input type="checkbox"/> Issue #5 <input type="checkbox"/> Issue #7 <input type="checkbox"/> Issue #8 <input type="checkbox"/> Issue #9 <input type="checkbox"/> Issue #10 <input type="checkbox"/> Issue #11 <input type="checkbox"/> Issue #12 <input type="checkbox"/> Issue #13 <input type="checkbox"/> Issue #14 <input type="checkbox"/> Issue #15 <input type="checkbox"/> Issue #16 <input type="checkbox"/> Issue #17 <input type="checkbox"/> Issue #18 <input type="checkbox"/> Issue #19	
<input type="checkbox"/> Just send the Avonlea Traditions catalogue only. \$3.00 (refundable with 1st order)			

Figure Eight
Ad for the Anne of Green Gables Catalogue, and Avonlea Traditions Chronicle, November 1996

thentic" products really signify? — our desire for recognizability or familiarity, perhaps, or a single, reductive origin we can trace, or consumer status, since products calling themselves "authentic" tend to be among the more expensive ones. A visit to the FAO Swartz Toy store, any toy store, or even the Anne of Green Gables Store, readily reveals this.

Will the "Real" Anne Please Stand Up?

There is as yet no definitive Anne image enshrined in a doll. Anne's dollified image is still in the cloning phase; there is, as we have seen, the Catherine Munn Anne doll, the Gallagher Morton (Avonlea Traditions) Anne doll, the Anne dolls produced by the Green Gables store, and other unspecified dolls who do not seem to come from anywhere in particular, and who do not come with "certificates of authentication." In the Green Gables Store, a few dolls are made in PEI but come with no "certificate" of authentication; is the consumer to assume that these products are unauthentic? There is even a small (not prominently displayed) number of obviously homemade Anne dolls and other Anne ornaments made out of sea shells. These items are, if anything, closest to being "real" and "authentic" since they are handcrafted, yet, ironically, they have little consumer appeal placed next to the glossy posters and perfect-looking porcelain dolls. In this sense, the store represents a site of confusing overlap between technological, industrial culture (e.g. Avonlea Traditions, Inc.) and the culture of the "folk" (locally handmade artifacts) although the latter is to a considerable degree marginalized within the store. The slick, intertextual marketing tactics evidenced in the Anne Store and in the battle for "authenticity" with respect to the definitive Anne image have managed to all but reverse the original meaning of "authenticity," which now seems to be closer to something corporate, Disney-fied.

The Anne Store, then, is a site of tensions between competing claims of authenticity as well as between homemade artifacts and mass-produced ones with homespun pretensions. The store owners count on the late-twentieth-century consumer's ability to accommodate contradictions. The ideal consumer, from a marketing perspective, will find little amiss in seeing a CD ROM or computer mouse pad in an old-fashioned country store, or a \$90.00 doll based on a literary character who was a penniless orphan.

Iconography for Sale

In the 1996 *Chatelaine* article cited above, Kathryn Gallagher Morton of Avonlea Traditions Inc. constructs the enduring appeal of Anne in terms of a nationalist iconography; "as long as there are Mounties and beavers," she says, "there'll be Anne." To what extent is Anne's identification as a national symbol really the key to her (or Morton's) success in the marketplace? What symbols, really, are for sale, in the Avonlea mythology?

An examination of products for sale in the Green Gables Store reveals that some images from Montgomery's books are privileged over others, and that an iconography, or set of saleable symbols, has built up around this privileged set of images. We can recognize these images as privileged by virtue of their repetition. The plates and postcards underscore symbols that are not necessarily nationalistic. Many ceramic plates depict the house, Green Gables, a privileged element in the iconography. The on-line Anne of Green Gables Store sells a ceramic Green Gables replica for \$39.99. It also sells a "limited edition collector's plate" for \$39.99. The image on the plate is Anne in her Megan Follows incarnation, standing in front of Green Gables. She has a book in her hand, and although the title is obscured, the image carries with it a curious self-reflexivity if we imagine that the character has stepped out of the book in which she was created. Among the eight-inch ceramic plates the Charlottetown store sells, Anne is featured on one apologizing to Mrs. Lynde; on another, smashing the slate over Gilbert's head — images of subordination and rebellion, but also images which exhibit what a female whose vanity is insulted, will do.

One of the most pervasive symbolic images for sale depicts Anne waiting at Bright River Station in the novel's second chapter. This is the scene depicted on the posters, and on a postcard manufactured by Avonlea Traditions Inc. (see figure nine). It is interesting that this is such a popular image, since it depicts the young heroine at her most vulnerable and passive, a victim of circumstance. It depicts her as homeless, a migrant figure, someone on the margins of society who is not yet accepted. As a symbol, it delineates someone who has "no place." The placeless female at Bright River, Grand Central Station, Whitcross, wherever. It is an image that allows comfortable middle-class consumers to romanticize the margins, the plight of the outsider who must wait to be rescued. Perhaps buying the plate or card with that image on it represents in some way a symbolic act of rescue.

The most privileged consumable images of Anne depict her at her most childlike: helpless, impetuous, governed by her emotions. It is not only a countrified, sentimentalized, and feminized past that is being marketed; it is the cult of childhood as well. A more innocent time. A more traditional construction of gender. The preponderance of dolls in the Green Gables marketplace enshrines the female child as perhaps *the* key commodity of the Avonlea mythology. Dolls symbolically reinforce the valuing of female identity as decorative, echoing mass media's tendency "to reproduce traditional sex roles" which position women as "subordinate, passive, submissive and marginal, performing a limited number of secondary and uninteresting tasks confined to their sexuality, their emotions and their domesticity" (Strinati 184).

Dolls may also, in some way, empower their owner. Every child is larger than his or her doll, owns his or her doll, bends the doll to his or her

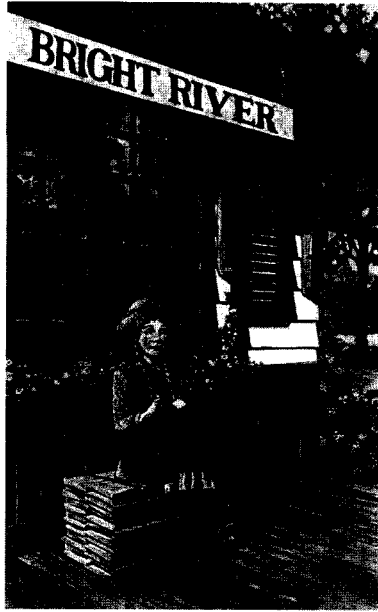


Figure Nine

© Avonlea Traditions Inc.
Avonlea Traditions Inc., 17075 Leslie St., #13,
Newmarket, ON L3Y 8E1

will. What is for sale in the Avonlea mythology is at once power and submissiveness; access to the world of the outsider from a position of comfort; participation in a quaint “residual” culture. The articulation of the Avonlea mythology in popular culture is fraught with meanings which are, often enough, contradictory. In this way, the popular culture texts predicated on *Anne of Green Gables* resonate with popular culture texts at large: as Fiske puts it, “full of gaps, contradictions, and inadequacies” (126).

However flawed, these popular culture texts (for those who can afford them) allow the possibility of letting other worlds into our lives. They may even serve to take us back to the primary texts — in this case, Montgomery’s novels. The acquisition of a ceramic replica of Green Gables or its heroine reflects our own desire for the iconography of a green world, childhood and innocence, all bound up with our desire for things knowable (we know Anne’s story ends happily), for control and possession. Consumable Avonlea embodies innocence and experience. Consumable Avonlea embraces both art and life; in the poster depicting Anne waiting at Bright River station hanging in some child’s bedroom, Anne will wait forever, suspended between past and future, like the child-owner of the bedroom herself, waiting for her future to begin.

Notes

- 1 In the spring session, 1998, I designed a course called "Green Gables and After: Women Writers of Atlantic Canada" which I taught in the Canadian Studies program, University of Washington, Seattle. Canadian students may have responded differently to the distinctly Canadian regional setting of *Anne of Green Gables*.
- 2 I visited The Anne of Green Gables Store in November, 1997; prices and merchandise may have changed slightly since then.

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Jeanette Lynes is an associate professor of English at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Her areas of specialization include Canadian literature, children's literature and regionalism.