



Weaving a Tapestry of Beauty: Anne Shirley as Domestic Artist

—Kathleen A. Miller

In L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Ingleside*, readers encounter the beloved heroine of *Anne of Green Gables*, Anne Shirley, now Anne Blythe, as a middle-aged wife and mother of six. As she contemplates her role as matron, she thinks, "she would hold all the threads of the Ingleside life in her hands again to weave into a tapestry of beauty" (55). Anne's ability to weave the threads of life, to create a beautiful tapestry of connected human experience from the lives of the individuals surrounding her, serves as proof of her domestic artistry. Even as a young girl, in Montgomery's classic canonical children's novel *Anne of Green Gables*, Anne Shirley weaves her life tapestry through the power of imagination. Earlier considerations of *Anne of Green Gables* and Anne as artist-figure have focused on her imaginative skills and her talents as a self-conscious dramatic artist and writer, and scholars such as Gillian

Thomas, Nancy Huse, and T.D. MacLulich have noted the "decline" of Anne's artistry as she matures throughout the series. I contend, however, that if readers examine Anne's role as a domestic artist who weaves the social fabric of the Avonlea community through her ability to imagine, appreciate, and create beauty, they encounter a self-fashioned heroine who yearns for membership in family and community while remaining "other-interested" or, in this case, invested in artistic creation.

In its centenary year, *Anne of Green Gables* continues to appeal to new generations of readers, and many readers who may wish to identify with Anne as artist-figure. Although a consideration of Anne as artist-figure may seem to be more focused on the concerns of adult women readers, the female-domestic-artist subtext of this novel does have relevance for child readers. Children's

literature not only offers readers a fictional world, but it also performs an educational function; the literature is both descriptive *and* prescriptive. *Anne of Green Gables* gives girls a way to construct more satisfying identities later, as women, by showing them the artistic potential present in the domestic sphere. This book teaches them early on about the possibility of fulfilling the demands of femininity while still enjoying the seemingly unfeminine pleasures of artistic achievement. Thus, Montgomery's novel sends powerful messages about feminism and gender roles to young readers of both the early-twentieth century and today.

In *Anne of Green Gables*, Anne brings her world into alignment with her desires by using the materials of domesticity and making a work of living art out of them. She demonstrates her artistry in a variety of ways: she performs as a self-conscious dramatic actress by participating in amateur elocution; she engages in a number of traditionally female domestic art activities (attention to fashion, gardening, and renovating the home space); and perhaps most compellingly, she serves as a social artist who creates a living narrative for, and from, the lives of the inhabitants of Avonlea. The import of Anne's social artistry rests in her ability to see people and the world as she imagines them and then to make other people view things in this way too. As she alters

the perceptions of Matthew, Marilla, Diana, and Mrs. Lynde, her acts of representation can be taken as a form of artistry. Ultimately, Anne functions as an artist-figure who successfully transforms the circumstances fate deals her.

Like her heroine, Anne, Montgomery used her artistry to negotiate competing feminine duties, including her later role as wife of a Presbyterian minister. Eleanor Hersey argues that Montgomery scholars have focused their attention on issues of female artistry in Montgomery's novels, particularly that of becoming both woman and writer, with the publication of her *Selected Journals*.¹ Re-evaluating Montgomery's fiction in light of the female artist-figure has the potential to offer a "unique contribution to late-twentieth-century popular culture and provide a new perspective on [her] life and work" (Hersey 132). Thus far, a majority of criticism on the female artist-figure in Montgomery's novels has centered on her Emily trilogy—*Emily of New Moon* (1923), *Emily Climbs* (1925), and *Emily's Quest* (1927)—rather than on her *Anne* books. Perhaps scholars have chosen to examine the *Emily* novels because, as Elizabeth Waterston posits, "The theme of a writer's ambition had been a sub-current in early 'Anne' books. Now it becomes a major strand [in the *Emily* books]" (211). Throughout the eight novels, Anne writes; her writing, though, never seems to



While Anne may not be a professional artist, her agency in the domestic sphere may help fulfill, rather than stifle, some of her artistic ambitions.



be a passion or a career. As recent Montgomery criticism has neglected Anne's artistry in favour of Emily's, it has privileged the development of the female professional artist. Perhaps this devaluation of Anne's art suggests that scholars may favour a figure who represents a supposedly more clear-cut definition of a contemporary feminist role model or, in other words, the woman whose artistry is professional.

Because it ignores Anne's artistic development in *Anne of Green Gables*, a gap exists in the Montgomery scholarship that discusses feminist artist role models. Scholars such as Thomas, Huse, and MacLulich have argued that a feminist reading of *Anne of Green Gables* and its sequels is problematized by the novels' valorization of feminine duty within the domestic sphere and the heroine's rejection of a literary career in favour of motherhood. Because of Anne's decision to adopt conventional patterns of marriage and motherhood rather than become a professional artist, MacLulich argues that "moments [when] Anne reveals the vision of a potential artist" (92), such as when she

admonishes Marilla for failing to imagine things differently from how they are, never achieve full realization. Yet by limiting Anne's success as artist-figure to her failed role as a professional writer, MacLulich ignores Anne's skill as a domestic artist.

As Cecily Devereux suggests, Anne only experiences a "decline" if scholars read her story primarily as a narrative of literary "progress"; instead, Devereux posits that Anne's progress "finally and uncompromisingly takes Anne from the career paths which she had seemed to be pursuing, and situates her romantic conclusion in the domestic image of the 'house of dreams,' where, we are to see, the highest 'womanly ambition is realized in motherhood'" (120). Devereux situates her argument in a discussion of English Canadian first-wave feminism, which characterized female ambition not by suffragism or the ideal of the "new woman," but rather by advocating that a woman's power came from her role as imperial "mother of the race" (125). While Devereux's argument does not respond to Anne as domestic artist, her position does situate the

feminist rhetoric of Montgomery's novels in history and acknowledges their potentially empowering messages for female readers. While Anne may not be a professional artist, her agency in the domestic sphere may help fulfill, rather than stifle, some of her artistic ambitions. For example, in *Anne of Ingleside*, Christine Stuart asks Anne if she still writes. Anne replies, "Not altogether . . . but I'm writing living epistles now" (268). Anne's literary ambitions have been subsumed by her role as social artist, one who helps to create life narratives for, and from, the individuals around her.

An argument like Devereux's, which asks readers to expand their notions of female artistry, coincides with the work of scholars such as Bettina Aptheker, Deborah Cherry, Pamela Gerrish Nunn, and Clarissa Campbell Orr, who advocate taking the everyday artistry of women seriously. I contend that a new light may be shed on the familiar text of *Anne of Green Gables* by considering their theories of female artistry. In *Tapestries of Life: Women's Work, Women's Consciousness, and the Meaning of Daily Experience* (1989), Aptheker writes:

To map women's consciousness, to give examples of women's cultures, to look at women's poems, stories, paintings, gardens, and quilts from this point of view is to make women's actions and beliefs intelligible on

their own terms. It is to show connections, to form patterns It is to recognize women's strategies for coping, surviving, shaping, and changing the parameters of their existence on their own terms. (14)

Aptheker posits that by examining the "dailiness" of women's lives we can reclaim the work of female artists that has long been ignored or devalued. Although Aptheker speaks specifically of women's domestic art as the process of creating items or objects—paintings, quilts, and gardens—her argument can be expanded to include women's social artistry, or art that artists create without producing a tangible product. As Aptheker's title suggests, women's art arises from their ability to weave "tapestries of life"; any creative attempt, whether it be a piece of pottery or a well-decorated supper table that represents women's knowledge or interpretation of events (15), participates in this female artistry.

Pamela Gerrish Nunn addresses the problems of defining women's art in relationship to considerations of professionalization alone in *Victorian Women Artists*. In her examination of nineteenth-century female artists, she does define an artist as "a person who paints or sculpts for a living, exhibiting, selling and expecting their products to be preserved for posterity" (6), yet



Anne's home is the site of her capital production;
her creation of a home is her product.



she simultaneously acknowledges that, when examining the lives of women artists, this strict definition cannot always be applied. Scholars such as Nunn, Cherry, and Orr suggest that a less rigid definition of female artistry must be employed to discuss women's art, especially in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The difficulties faced by these women artists, such as poor educational opportunities and lack of ability to exhibit and sell their work, meant that women artists learned to define themselves as much by self-evaluations of their creativity and ambition as by success in the economic and public sphere. Consequently, lack of exposure and/or public recognition could not negate the work of these artists.

Despite not having status as a professional artist-figure (Montgomery does not suggest that any professional artists reside in Avonlea, though, so Anne's lack of professional status is not unusual), Anne offers her audience, the community of Avonlea and the community of imagined readers, a different way of seeing reality—a woman-centered perspective rooted in the power of Anne's own

imagination and the "dailiness" of her social artistry. Female artistry becomes defined by a woman's ability to offer creative representations of the world surrounding her, through a variety of media such as writing, painting, sewing, gardening, and conversation (Nunn 6). A woman's artistry, then, may be self-defined. And while Anne only declares herself an artist, a weaver of life's tapestry, in *Anne of Ingleside*, her skills as domestic and social artist are demonstrated quite clearly in *Anne of Green Gables*. Anne's home is the site of her capital production; her creation of a home is her product. While her audience may not be fully aware of her artistic "exhibition," her art does possess a public dimension—as she creates a sense of home, she creates the narrative not only of home life but also of community life. Anne proves to be an artist because her work serves an economic and public function, despite the lack of recognition from outside. As Anne imagines the community of Avonlea, and later Glen St. Mary, she encourages others to see and to value her creative representations of people and landscape.

By creating this tapestry of community life,

the child Anne engages in a kind of social artistry, taking the materials of domesticity and making a personal life narrative, or a type of living art, from them. Much like a younger version of Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Ramsay from the novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927), she arranges both the surrounding landscape and the people of Avonlea. Whereas Lily Briscoe, the aspiring young professional artist in *To the Lighthouse*, "has her [artistic] vision" by completing her painting (310), the middle-aged matron Mrs. Ramsay has her artistic vision through domestic art. It is Mrs. Ramsay's ability to host a successful dinner party—to arrange linens, flowers, and people in a beautiful manner—that constitutes her success as social artist: "And like some queen who, finding her people gathered in the hall, looks down upon them, and descends among them, and acknowledges their tributes silently . . . she went down, and crossed the hall and bowed her head very slightly, as if she accepted what they could not say: their tribute to her beauty" (124). Although some Montgomery scholars seem to suggest that such social artistry no longer proves relevant, that it should be eclipsed by the more highly valued ideal of the professional female-artist figure, many women can identify with the creativity and imagination necessary to tell their stories through daily domestic materials. The recent success of

figures such as Martha Stewart and Rachael Ray, who have built successful empires teaching women domestic arts, indicates that women continue to be interested in cultivating artistry in the private sphere. Consequently, many contemporary women would be inclined to respond to a heroine who desired to be a domestic and social artist. Thus, although Anne may not be a professional writer, she is every bit as artistic as Montgomery's Emily. Anne becomes both woman and artist, embracing a "dailiness" of female artistry with which many women can identify.

Anne Shirley as Domestic Artist in *Anne of Green Gables*

One way in which Anne manifests the dailiness of her art is through her self-conscious dramatic acting. In *What Katy Read: Feminist Re-Readings of "Classic" Stories for Girls*, Shirley Foster and Judy Simons comment on the performative nature of Anne's character: "[She is] the conscious actor in her own drama, she simultaneously fashions roles and demolishes them Conscious self-dramatization is . . . one of Anne's most notable traits, enabling her to establish a personal place in an unaccommodating environment and to reveal that environment's shortcomings" (166). Foster and Simons cite Anne's ability as an actress in a number of scenes: her apology to

Mrs. Lynde, her role as the unfortunate Lily Maid, and her histrionic role-playing when punished by Marilla for stealing her amethyst broach. While Anne demonstrates skill as a performer in each of these instances, she also showcases her talent for “professional” acting in the form of being an amateur elocutionist. Anne participates in two dramatic enterprises, a school concert sponsored by Miss Stacy and a hotel concert. In both cases, Anne’s talent as performance artist is evident to her surrounding audience: “The concert came off in the evening and was a pronounced success. The little hall was crowded; all the performers did excellently well, but Anne was the bright particular star of the occasion, as even envy, in the shape of Josie Pye, dare not deny” (274–75).

Similarly, “honest applause” meets Anne’s performance at the hotel concert and she performs an encore (354). Anne’s triumph as a performer in these two concerts serves as one of the rare examples of her artistry having an obvious public acknowledgment—applause and congratulations from an audience conscious of the fact that they have just watched her perform an artistic feat. In addition, Anne’s success has an economic component. While Anne does not make money for either exhibition of her skills, her participation in the school concert helps to pay for the schoolhouse flag, and her role as

amateur elocutionist at the hotel concert helps raise money for the Charlottetown hospital. Her dramatic art serves a social function, as her talents at exhibition unite the Avonlea and Charlottetown communities in common causes. Consequently, her achievement at amateur elocution coincides with her role as social artist—Anne not only weaves together the life narratives of the various individuals in her community, but also, by contributing to the hospital initiative, she uses her artistry to beautify and improve the lives of others.

In addition to her acting talent, Anne also evidences her social-artistry skills in the traditional feminine forms of domestic art. As Aptheker notes, “The need for beauty, for art, is everywhere in the dailiness of women’s lives: in plants and gardens, in the textile arts, in the linen tablecloths and ritual dinners prepared with elaborate care” (48). Anne not only appreciates beauty, but also serves as its creator. Because she literally makes beautiful things from the domestic materials surrounding her, there is a tangible product to her artistry. Upon returning to Green Gables after a sojourn in the woods, Anne says, “Look at these maple branches. Don’t they give you a thrill—several thrills? I’m going to decorate my room with them.” A chagrined Marilla replies, “Messy things You clutter your room up entirely with too much out-of-doors stuff, Anne. Bedrooms were made

to sleep in" (177). Here, Montgomery notes that, as of yet, Marilla's "aesthetic sense was not noticeably developed," (177) contrasting Anne's abilities as visual domestic artist with Marilla's lack of aesthetic vision. And while she never achieves Anne's abilities of taste, Marilla's appreciation for the beautiful does develop as she begins to internalize Anne's vision of the world. Marilla evolves as she comes to embrace the living narrative Anne has created at Green Gables.

Eventually, Anne's aesthetic vision prevails: "The east gable was a very different place from what it had been on that night four years before, when Anne had felt its bareness penetrate to the marrow of her spirit with its inhospitable chill. Changes had crept in, Marilla conniving at them resignedly, until it was as sweet and dainty a nest as a young girl could desire" (345). Anne has added pretty matting to the floor, pale green art-muslin curtains at the windows, and dainty apple-blossom paper adorned with a few good pictures to the walls. These simple, feminine touches serve to completely renovate the room to include warmth, familiarity, and a sense of home. Here, Anne does not earn a living from art, but she recreates a way of living, for herself and the Cuthberts, by recreating the home she works in and from. Changing Matthew and Marilla's vision of what it means to have a home-space, Anne

adds not simply beauty to Green Gables but also warmth and a desire for greater human connection and communication.

Through domestic art, Anne attempts to connect not only with Matthew and Marilla, but also with the other inhabitants of Avonlea. When Marilla tells Anne she may invite Diana for tea, Anne proves just as excited by the opportunity to serve as domestic artist—arranging the table, using the good rosebud tea china—as she is to have an afternoon with her friend. Similarly, Anne puts her artistic skills to use when the Allans come to tea. Initially, Marilla does not want Anne to decorate the table with flowers, but when Anne mentions that Mrs. Barry has decorated *her* table for the Allans, Marilla relents. Apparently, Marilla acknowledges the power of a beautiful table setting to make guests feel welcomed and appreciated, and to demonstrate the thoughtfulness and skill of the hostess, when she recognizes the danger of her home being compared to other abodes. Despite Marilla's initial qualms about having Anne decorate the table,

Anne laid herself out to decorate in a manner and after a fashion that should leave Mrs. Barry's nowhere. Having abundance of roses and ferns and a very artistic taste of her own, she made that tea-table such a thing of beauty



With a new organdy dress, hothouse flowers, a well-positioned hairdo, and a string of pearls, Anne has represented herself as beautiful, and the community of Avonlea has come to acknowledge this depiction as truth.



that when the minister and his wife sat down to it they exclaimed in chorus over its loveliness.
(241)

While Anne may ultimately fail in many domestic duties—serving the Allans a liniment cake does not establish her status as a “domestic goddess”—her ability as a domestic artist proves evident in her visual artistry and her control over decorating and arranging. Not only does Anne herself gain enjoyment from her skill as a domestic artist, but she also creates beauty for her audience. While the clapping audience members at the school and hotel concerts realize they are witnessing an artistic performance, the individuals who encounter Anne’s domestic displays may not be fully aware of the art present in her domestic “touches.” Yet both audiences are clearly moved by her art and they respond to its loveliness in choruses of exclamation. As Anne provides these simple touches of everyday domestic beauty, she engages in the kind of “daily” artistry Aptheker

advocates as the province of women’s art.

One significant instance of Anne using the materials of domesticity to alter the perceptions of those around her is in her ability to use fashion to create her own physical beauty. As a young girl, Anne is beset by fears of her homeliness, clearly embodied in anxieties over her red hair. By skillfully mastering the art of dress, Anne creates an artistic representation of herself as beautiful. As she prepares for the hotel concert, Diana says, “There’s something so stylish about you, Anne” (349), and even Marilla acknowledges that Anne looks “neat and proper. I like that way of fixing her hair” (350). Upon the success of her performance, an American artist says he should like to paint the girl with “the splendid Titian hair” (355). With a new organdy dress, hothouse flowers, a well-positioned hairdo, and a string of pearls, Anne has represented herself as beautiful, and the community of Avonlea has come to acknowledge this depiction as truth. Anne has even succeeded in making her despised red hair a thing of beauty, as the male, American visual

artist courts her vision of beauty with hopes to paint it and exhibit it as his own.

While many members of the Avonlea community come to see Anne as attractive and stylish, perhaps the individual whose perceptions experience the greatest alteration in light of Anne's artistic fashion abilities is Mrs. Rachel Lynde. Mrs. Lynde, who initially calls Anne "homely," later confesses,

It's nothing short of wonderful how she's improved in these three years, but especially in looks. She's a real pretty girl got to be, though I can't say I'm overly partial to that pale, big-eyed style myself. I like more snap and colour, like Diana Barry has or Ruby Gillis. Ruby Gillis' looks are real showy. But somehow—I don't know how it is but when Anne and them are together, though she ain't half as handsome, she makes them look kind of common and overdone, something like them white June lilies she calls narcissus alongside of the big, red peonies, that's what. (325–26)²

Anne's ability to make even the opinionated, strong-minded Mrs. Rachel Lynde acknowledge her beauty illuminates the power of Anne's imagination and artistic representation. It proves imperative to Anne's success as Avonlea social artist that she win

over Mrs. Lynde, social watchdog and regulator of the status quo. By gaining the approval of a woman admired for her own domestic art, handiwork, and ability to make social connections, Anne achieves a certain status in Avonlea. Anne proves to be a social artist capable of rivaling Mrs. Lynde, able to create new narratives for the individuals of Avonlea, narratives that may deviate from Mrs. Lynde's old narratives endorsing the status quo.

Although Anne's artistry finds form in tangible demonstrations of art such as performance and domestic art, there proves to be a slightly more abstract deployment of Anne's skill as social artist. In the instance of Mrs. Lynde, readers see Anne not only putting forth an artistic, beautiful physical appearance, but also creating a representation of herself that individuals in the community come to see as true, despite their initial prejudices and reservations. Citing Anne's feminist characteristics such as aggression, independence, and practicality, Janet Weiss-Townsend argues,

Her use of her imagination to make her world a better one may be described quite literally as wish-fulfillment fantasy, but it is a real power, precisely because Anne controls it. She knows her imaginings are just that—imaginings; but they help her to cope with the world as it is given to her. It is a peculiar power, a power for

the powerless, if you like, but it works for Anne.
(111)

Anne functions as an artist-figure, one who successfully revises the circumstances fate deals her. Much like Charlotte Brontë's visual, storytelling, and domestic artist, Jane Eyre, whose "eyes" serve as interpreters of reality for the blinded Rochester, Anne's perception of the world, and representation of it, becomes a new lens through which the Avonlea community begins to see reality. Most notably, this re-visioning of their world, discussed in subsequent paragraphs, occurs in the domestic sphere, as Anne fashions a family for herself, made up of the Cuthberts and other members of the Avonlea community.

By examining the power of Anne's imagination in the creation of her home landscape and family; of her interactions with her guardians, Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert; and of Anne's final decision to remain at Green Gables instead of accepting the Avery scholarship to Redmond College, readers see how Anne constructs both her sense of family and her sense of home. Ultimately, her quest for home results in a self-designed family of emotionally connected individuals, rather than blood relations—individuals who accept Anne for her imagination and her spirit. I would suggest that Anne's "family" is not limited to

Matthew and Marilla. Anne's circle of family, the individuals whose lives form the fabric of her life's tapestry, draws from a variety of sources. By the end of the novel, it consists of numerous "kindred spirits": Matthew and Diana Barry, and others who originally started out as antagonists to Anne's sense of home and belonging: Mrs. Allan, Aunt Josephine, Miss Stacy, Mrs. Rachel Lynde, and Gilbert Blythe. Anne's "family" unit comes together through love, personal choice, and Anne's social artistry. She weaves the threads of family and community until she creates a beautiful tapestry of self-fashioned home life.

Montgomery tells readers briefly about Anne's childhood prior to Green Gables, of how Anne had been forced into family and community units, such as that of the Hammonds, and alludes to abuse and ill-treatment. By the time Mrs. Spencer announces Anne's adoption, Anne's greatest desire is for a fulfilling family and home life. Marilla and Mrs. Lynde attribute Anne's arrival at Green Gables to a mistake, as the Cuthberts initially wanted a boy. Yet Matthew says much later, "She's been a blessing to us, and there never was a luckier mistake than what Mrs. Spencer made—if it was luck. I don't believe it was any such thing. It was Providence, because the Almighty saw we needed her, I reckon." (360). While Matthew believes Anne's arrival is a matter of divine intervention,

Montgomery's text invites a different interpretation. Although Anne does not literally control her arrival at Green Gables, metaphorically, her own imagination, not the hand of Providence, brings her to Green Gables.

Even before her arrival, Anne shapes her family and her home at Green Gables through her imagination. While riding home from the Bright River station with Matthew, she says, "I've always heard that Prince Edward Island is the prettiest place in the world, and I used to imagine I was living here but I never really expected I would. It's delightful when your imaginations come true, isn't it?" (54–55). Later, she exclaims, "Fancy! It's always been one of my dreams to live near a brook. I never expected I would, though. Dreams don't often come true, do they?" (56). In a sense, Anne dreams her home into being—she has always imagined herself living on PEI, near a brook; the landscape of her mental home-space predicts itself upon the physical surroundings of her future home. She brings fresh eyes to her vision of the landscape and transforms it into what she imagines it ought to be, for herself, and eventually for others. For example, Anne does not care for the established name of the stretch of Newbridge road named the Avenue. Instead, she renames it "The White Way of Delight." Anne's raptures over "that white place" causes Matthew to re-evaluate the same

stretch of road he has travelled many times before: "'Well now, you must mean the Avenue,' said Matthew after a few moments' profound reflection. 'It is a kind of a pretty place.'" (59). Despite Matthew's lack of imagination and romance, Anne has succeeded in changing his perception of the Avenue. He now appreciates and responds to its beauty, based on her creative imagining and artistic representation of the surrounding landscape.

Once Anne has imaginatively called her home landscape into being, she must begin to create a family, and a true sense of home, from more than the mental furnishings of her imagination. Though Anne has no blood relationships with the residents of Avonlea, she creates a family of emotionally connected individuals from the members of its community. In addition to the immediate connection Anne establishes with Matthew Cuthbert, Diana is another Avonlea citizen who may be considered part of Anne's extended family. Readers may sense that Matthew, or even Marilla, loves Anne, but Diana is the first to say it: "I couldn't love anybody as I love you" (191). Once Mrs. Barry has prevented Anne and Diana from seeing each other, Anne tells Marilla, "I shall never have another friend. I'm really worse off than ever before, for I haven't Katie Maurice and Violetta now. And even if I had it wouldn't be



Diana's compliance with Anne's vision can be interpreted as she and Anne having an ideal artist-audience connection.



the same. Somehow, little dream girls are not as satisfying after a real friend" (192). While Anne claims that dream friends are not as satisfying as real friends, in many ways, Anne has imaginatively fashioned her friendship with Diana, much as she has brought Katie Maurice or Violetta into being.

Before she meets Diana, Anne expresses her hope that a bosom friend will exist in Avonlea: "a real kindred spirit to whom I can confide my inmost soul. I've dreamed of meeting her all my life. I never really supposed I would, but so many of my loveliest dreams have come true all at once that perhaps this one will, too" (105–06). In response, Marilla mentions Diana. Here it appears that Anne is shocked by the power of her own imagination and its ability to manipulate her surrounding reality. Not content with merely having a bosom friend, she asks, "What is Diana like? Her hair isn't red, is it? Oh, I hope not. It's bad enough to have red hair myself, but I positively couldn't endure it in a bosom friend" (106). Luckily for Anne, Diana is as beautiful as she can imagine her—the young girl has dark brown hair, black eyes, and rosy cheeks (58). Anne envisions that the

real physical and unchanging characteristics Diana already has do, in fact, accord with her dream vision.

As Anne persuades Diana to be her bosom friend, she also makes Diana accept her representation of friendship. Upon first meeting, without knowing her, Anne asks Diana to be her "bosom friend," and Diana automatically accepts. While their friendship proves to be one of mutual respect, admiration, and shared interest, their initial meeting demonstrates no grounds for instant compatibility.³ Yet from this meeting, the two girls develop the lifelong friendship Anne has always imaginatively desired. In the bucolic Barry garden, Anne and Diana swear an oath of friendship: "The Barry garden was a bowery wilderness of flowers which would have delighted Anne's heart at any time less fraught with destiny. It was encircled with huge old willows and tall firs . . . a garden it was where sunshine lingered and bees hummed and winds, beguiled into loitering, purred and rustled" (138).

While the text posits that Anne is too preoccupied to appreciate the setting, it offers

suggestions that Anne does still respond to the aesthetic elements of the scene, at least on some level. The setting for their oath proves to be almost ideal for the beauty-loving Anne: “We must join hands—so . . . It ought to be over running water. We’ll just have to imagine this path is running water. I’ll repeat the oath first. I solemnly swear to be faithful to my bosom friend, Diana Barry, as long as the sun and the moon shall endure” (140). When the Barry garden does not measure up to the garden of Anne’s imagination, she mentally alters it, imagining a stream of running water from a dry dirt path. Not even the threat of Mrs. Barry’s anger prevents Anne from arranging her tableau according to her desired specifications. Like an actress readying herself for a great performance, Anne’s dramatic declaration of eternal devotion must be set on the perfect stage. The instance of Anne and Diana’s oath demonstrates both Anne’s self-conscious dramatic artistry and her powers as imaginative social artist. Through her imagination, she has the artistic ability to manipulate her reality and provide herself and her audience, Diana, with a tableau befitting the kind of dramatic friendship Anne desires and the kind that, ultimately, she convinces Diana is necessary and beautiful. Diana’s relative passivity in the scene can be read as a sign that her friendship with Anne is not egalitarian; on the other hand, I argue that Diana’s

compliance with Anne’s vision can be interpreted as she and Anne having an ideal artist-audience connection. Diana appreciates, acknowledges, and accepts Anne’s art without a need or desire to challenge it. The two engage in a powerful scene of artist-audience sympathy based on Diana’s accurate understanding of Anne’s imagination and creation.

Although Anne’s friendship with Diana may serve as her first loving relationship, she must also construct a family unit with the Cuthberts. All appears to be lost in Anne’s desire for home when she meets Marilla, who insists that she be returned; the Cuthberts have no use for a girl. Anne cries, “You don’t want me because I’m not a boy! I might have expected it. Nobody ever did want me” (66). Desperate to stay, she asks, “If I was very beautiful and had nut-brown hair would you keep me?” (69). Anne’s attempts to re-imagine her gender and her hair colour fall on deaf ears. Initially, Marilla refuses to accept Anne’s direction and participate in her imaginative representation of herself. Later, Anne continues her pleas: “I’ll try to do and be anything you want me to, if you’ll only keep me” (95). Anne bargains to be something she is not in order to stay at Green Gables, but when the Cuthberts finally do allow her to stay, they keep Anne for who she is, not for their own initial reasons for the adoption or because of

Anne's promises to change. Anne's actual identity controls the construction of the new family unit. Toward the end of the narrative, in a scene that validates Anne's gender, Matthew says, "Well now, I'd rather have you than a dozen boys, Anne . . . Just mind you that—rather than a dozen boys. Well now, I guess it wasn't a boy that took the Avery scholarship, was it? It was a girl—my girl—my girl that I'm proud of" (378). Anne's anxiety over being accepted for herself, which has been present from her first meeting with the Cuthberts, has been assuaged. In order for Anne to be a social artist who inspires change in the residents of Avonlea, one who encourages them to embrace her creation of a new living narrative, Anne attempts to change herself in response to Avonlea must conclude, and instead she must foster change in its residents. Furthermore, the new Avonlea life narrative values the female gender and women's abilities as creative artists.

From the start of the narrative, Matthew has always been in Anne's "family." An immediate emotional connection springs up between the unlikely pair, talkative Anne and taciturn Matthew. Matthew and Anne are "kindred spirits," and from her arrival at Green Gables, Matthew wants Anne to stay. Marilla serves as a "tougher sell" for the young orphan; the relationship between the woman and the girl develops gradually. The

two do not automatically construct a ready-made family. In fact, Marilla is reluctant to entertain the linguistic forms of a family connection with Anne, refusing to let Anne refer to her as "Aunt Marilla" (102). But Marilla's feelings change over the course of the narrative as Anne influences them with her imagination and her construction of home and family.

Of Marilla's developing sense of home and Anne's role in it, Montgomery writes, "Marilla, as she picked her steps along the damp lane, thought that it was really a satisfaction to know that she was going home to a briskly snapping wood fire and a table nicely spread for tea, instead of to the cold comfort of old Aid meeting evenings before Anne had come to Green Gables" (285–86). Marilla appreciates the sense of home and family that Anne establishes at Green Gables. Using the domestic materials at hand and her imagined sense of a proper home life—making a fire and setting out food—she constructs a home for herself, Matthew, and Marilla. Soon, Marilla begins to see the validity in Anne's artistic representation of home life and she favours the Anne-infused, warm, and cheery Green Gables to the homestead's former "cold comforts." Through her own charm, not through a loss of identity, Anne earns Marilla's love. They become a family as Anne compels Marilla to recognize her as a kindred spirit, not

through Anne changing to resemble Marilla's ideal. Anne fashions a representation of love and home life, and eventually Marilla comes to see this representation as an improvement.

The aftermath of Matthew's death evidences the depth of Marilla and Anne's familial connection. Anne sobs, "Stay here for a little while with me and keep your arm round me—so. I couldn't have Diana stay . . . it's not her sorrow—she's outside of it and she couldn't come close enough to my heart to help me. It's our sorrow—yours and mine" (382). Here, Anne's decision to exclude Diana from the family unit seems to complicate the assertion that Anne creates a family from non-blood relatives. I contend, however, that the text momentarily excludes Diana from the family unit so that Anne and Marilla can succeed in solidifying their bond as family members by sharing in a mutual sorrow. While declarations of family love may prove natural to Anne, Marilla's sentiments come less easily. Significantly, though, they echo Anne's: "We've got each other, Anne. I don't know what I'd do if you weren't here—if you'd never come . . . I love you as dear as if you were my own flesh and blood and you've been my joy and comfort ever since you came to Green Gables" (382). With Matthew's death, Montgomery has not only succeeded in creating (and destroying) one non-traditional, non-nuclear family unit (Anne, Matthew, and Marilla),

but she has also created a second. This second family unit, consisting of Anne and Marilla, now possesses a strong matriarchal nature.

Montgomery's new family contains no male presence; instead, a fully female-centred family structure appears as the new model at the end of *Anne of Green Gables*. While the death of Matthew may be less than ideal (both Marilla and Anne sincerely mourn his loss), Montgomery does present Marilla and Anne's home life without Matthew as successful and happy. Anne and Marilla's family unit suggests that the everyday lives of women are valuable and legitimate, even if they exist independently of the traditional patriarchal family. In fact, as Montgomery suggests a new family model and a new life narrative for Anne and Marilla, she advocates for Anne's social artistry by validating the realm of the female and by breaking from the status quo of the male-dominated family.

Although Montgomery's novel celebrates this female-centred family, critics largely ignore this development. Instead, Elizabeth Epperly, Eve Kornfield, and Susan Jackson call the novel's ending conventional, arguing that the important element with which Anne's narrative ends is the promise of romantic union with Gilbert Blythe and the cessation of her individual quest. Although Gilbert's decision to give up the Avonlea school for

Anne does allow her to stay at Green Gables and does prompt their reconciliation—which will lead, many books later, to their marriage—her romance with Gilbert is not the motivating factor for Anne’s remaining in Avonlea. Susan Drain suggests, “Anne acknowledges her bond to be more important than her individual plans Individuality, then, is established not in contrast to a community, but by a commitment to it, and the individual’s freedom is not in isolation of independence, but in the complexity of connection” (129). Anne’s complexity of connection is a byproduct of her artistry; the connections are ones she has woven from the social fabric of Avonlea. With regard to Anne’s agency in her decision to remain at Green Gables, Laura M. Robinson suggests that Anne “negotiate[s] the contradictory ideological pressures of conformity and agency: even if she’s a little pruned down and limited because of social pressures, she ends the novel having done what she wants to do” (39). Anne remains at Green Gables to preserve the self-fashioned home, family life, and sense of belonging she has creatively woven from the social fabric of Avonlea.

Anne consciously chooses to delay leaving Avonlea: “I’m not going to take the scholarship. *I decided* so the night after you came home from town Oh, I have it all planned out, Marilla . . . we’ll be real cozy and happy here together,

you and I” (emphasis mine; 390). Despite staying in Avonlea, though, Anne does not plan on ending her dreams of scholarship: “I’m just as ambitious as ever I mean to study at home here and take a little college course all by myself” (390). In a conversation with Mrs. Lynde regarding her college plans, Anne tells her that she has no “vocation for fancy work,” and thus will have plenty of time to devote to teaching and studying without exhausting herself. This declaration may seem like Anne, or the text, belittles traditional female artistry, yet I posit that this is an instance where the nineteenth-century competing ideologies of the public and domestic spheres cause Anne, momentarily, to frame her educational ambition as something that must be separate and distinct from the womanly duties of the home. While she may claim not to engage in fancy-work, Anne has shown throughout the text, consistently, that she can fulfill competing public and private duties. She performs recitals, decorates tables, and redesigns her room while still being a star pupil. Regarding her future dreams of Redmond, she says, “My future seemed to stretch out before me like a straight road. I thought I could see along it for many a milestone. Now there is a bend in it. I don’t know what lies around the bend, but I’m going to believe that the best does” (390). As evidenced earlier in the text, *dreaming* furthers Anne’s ambitions; readers have already seen the

power of Anne's dreams to impose themselves upon domestic spaces and relationships to conform to Anne's desire.

Marilla resists encouraging any feelings of duty or self-sacrifice Anne may feel in making the decision: "But I can't let you sacrifice yourself so for me. It would be terrible" (390). Anne assures her, "There is no sacrifice. Nothing could be worse than giving up Green Gables—nothing could hurt me more. We must keep the dear old place" (390). Despite critics' assertions that Anne sacrifices in staying at Green Gables, to Anne, there is no sacrifice in delaying her journey to Redmond College. She acknowledges that "we," she and Marilla, must keep the home and family

they now share. Anne's constructed family and home, the realization of her imaginative power, prove to be too precious to lose. By delaying the Avery scholarship, Anne can "have it all"—a fulfilling, self-fashioned family *and* the promise of a rewarding professional education. By taking domestic materials and remaking them into new forms, Anne becomes the artist-figure with whom audiences wish to identify. As Anne prepares to turn 100, her story endures, offering readers a text with a legacy of female agency and domestic social artistic ambition that prepares young readers—especially female readers—to meet the demands of domestic femininity while encouraging the value of artistic expression and production.

Notes

¹ While examining the popularity of Kevin Sullivan's 1980s Anne miniseries for television, Eleanor Hersey suggests that "the popularity of these films among many of Montgomery's most devoted readers suggests that the image of Anne as a professional writer contains great genuine appeal for contemporary women" (132).

² Debates over Anne's appearance continue, yet her skill for artistic dress remains evident throughout the novels. In *Anne of the Island*, Philippa Gordon says, "Anne, this is certainly your night for looking handsome. Nine nights out of ten I can easily outshine you. The tenth you blossom out suddenly into something that eclipses me altogether" (168).

³ Perhaps Montgomery posits Anne and Diana as kindred spirits through the subtle suggestion that Diana is reading when Anne first sees her (86). Yet Diana quickly loses such scholarly ambitions and Anne becomes the more academic friend. This reversal allows Montgomery to emphasize Anne's "unique" abilities. If Diana abandons scholarly ambitions, then Anne's concentration on academics becomes atypical to earlier modes of Avonlea life and part of Anne's recreation project. Thus, Anne gains more power as the author of the new narrative of Avonlea, one that now emphasizes female ambition, education, and imagination.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Margaret Stetz and Professor Pamela Regis for their suggestions in the reformulation of these ideas and in the revision of this essay.

Works Cited

Aptheker, Bettina. *Tapestries of Life: Women's Work, Women's Consciousness, and the Meaning of Daily Experience*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1989.

Cherry, Deborah. *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Devereux, Cecily. "'not one of those dreadful new women': Anne Shirley and the Culture of Imperial Motherhood."

Windows and Words: A Look at Canadian Children's Literature in English. Ed. Aida Hudson and Susan-Ann Cooper. Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 2003. 119–30.

Drain, Susan. "Community and the Individual in *Anne of Green Gables*: The Meaning of Belonging." Reimer 119–30.

Epperly, Elizabeth Rollins. *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass: L.M. Montgomery's Heroines and the Pursuit of Romance*.

- Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992.
- Foster, Shirley, and Judy Simmons. "L.M. Montgomery: Anne of Green Gables." *What Katy Read: Feminist Re-Readings of "Classic" Stories for Girls*. Ed. Shirley Foster and Judy Simons. Iowa City: U of Iowa P., 1995. 149–71.
- Hersey, Eleanor. "'It's all mine': The Modern Woman as Writer in Sullivan's *Anne of Green Gables* Films." *Making Avonlea: L.M. Montgomery and Popular Culture*. Ed. Irene Gammel. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2002. 131–44.
- Huse, Nancy. "Journeys of the Mother in the World of Green Gables." *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the Children's Literature Association*. Ed. Susan R. Gannon and Anne Ruth Thompson. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 1988. 60–63.
- Kornfield, Eve, and Susan Jackson. "The Female *Bildungsroman* in Nineteenth-Century America: Parameters of a Vision." Reimer 139–52.
- MacLulich, T.D. "L.M. Montgomery's Portraits of the Artist: Realism, Idealism, and the Domestic Imagination." Reimer 83–100.
- Montgomery, L.M. *The Annotated Anne of Green Gables*. 1908. Ed. Wendy E. Barry, Margaret Anne Doody, and Mary E. Doody Jones. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.
- . *Anne of Ingleside*. 1939. New York: Bantam, 1987.
- . *Anne of the Island*. 1915. New York: Bantam, 1987.
- Nunn, Pamela Gerrish. *Victorian Women Artists*. London: The Women's P, 1987.
- Orr, Clarissa Campbell. *Women in the Victorian Art World*. New York: Manchester UP, 1995.
- Reimer, Mavis, ed. *Such a Simple Little Tale: Critical Responses to L.M. Montgomery's Anne of Green Gables*. New Jersey: Scarecrow, 1992.
- Robinson, Laura M. "'Pruned down and branched out': Embracing Contradiction in *Anne of Green Gables*." *Children's Voices in Atlantic Literature and Culture: Essays on Childhood*. Ed. Hilary Thompson. Guelph: Canadian Children's P, 1995. 35–43.
- Thomas, Gillian. "The Decline of Anne: Matron vs. Child." *CCL* 3 (1975): 37–41.
- Waterston, Elizabeth. "Lucy Maud Montgomery 1874–1942." *The Clear Spirit: Twenty Canadian Women and Their Times*. Ed. Mary Quayle Innis. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1966. 198–220.
- Weiss-Townsend, Janet. "Sexism Down on the Farm?: *Anne of Green Gables*." Reimer 109–18.
- Wolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse*. 1927. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanich, 1955.

Kathleen A. Miller is a graduate student at the University of Delaware. She completed her master's degree in May 2007 and is currently working toward her Ph.D. Her major literary interests include nineteenth-century British literature, women's writing, and the gothic imagination. Her recent work includes an essay in *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* ("Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith*: Leaving Women's Fingerprints on Victorian Pornography"). Her forthcoming publications focus on Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* and children's biographies of Florence Nightingale.