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

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Abstract: Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, the representation of a particular time and space in an artistic work, is used to explore connections between *Anne of Green Gables* (Montgomery, 1908) and *Elijah of Buxton* (2007). Written a century apart, these novels both feature an eleven-year-old protagonist in a 19th century Canadian village, though in many crucial ways they are worlds apart. Using each as a lens for looking at the other raises new questions about how each author has chosen to draw on history and geography to create a Canadian fiction.

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For a century, *Anne of Green Gables* (1992/1908)has dominated the canon of Canadian children's literature, and there are many fruitful ways to explore that domination. In this article I will explore some manifestations of *Anne*, drawing on the original novel, a number of re-workings, and a new novel that is entirely unconnected to the *oeuvre* of L.M. Montgomery yet is profoundly related to important questions of national story and myth.

In contemporary Canada, Anne is iconic to a point almost past caricaturing, though adaptor Kevin Sullivan (famous for his three television mini-series versions of *Anne*) seems determined to test the limits (how else can we interpret a Sullivan animation of *Anne of Green Gables* in which the main plotline is that Diana has head-lice [Sullivan Entertainment, 2002]? You couldn't make it up!) Anne is wholesome to begin with, and her contemporary commodifiers have sanitized her further. For example, a social website for children where entry is confirmed by fingerprint reader to ensure child safety is labelled *Anne's Diary*, and little girls are encouraged to write journal entries, to correspond with each other and to buy *Anne* stuff. "Our goal," says the website,

> is to establish a virtual world specifically designed for and utilized by Green Gables fans of all ages. Taking Anne as our inspiration, the site will offer an entertaining and educational environment where users are encouraged to explore their creativity through the use of a personal interactive diary that will walk them through their daily tasks and reminders as well as providing them with a unique space in which to record their adventures and wishes (http://www.annesdiary.com/institutions/, accessed February 24, 2008).

There is no question that the original Anne was obliged by Marilla to complete her "daily tasks and reminders" before getting on with being creative, but the priorities listed in this outline do have a discouragingly parent-approved quality to them.

It is a notable, though perhaps not surprising feature of this website that security on the sign-in requirements is relaxed if you want to check out the site store (http://www.annesdiary.com/?v=store, accessed February 24, 2008); and even non-members are free to shop for Montgomery and Sullivan texts (the two advertised dolls were not available for purchase the day I looked).

But even as Sullivan's animated cartoons and *Anne's Diary* work hard to create a one-dimensional image of Anne, her role as the heroine of a national work of literature makes everything more complex. The relationship between this imagined girl and the real country of Canada is ontologically complicated. (Even *Anne's Diary* reflects a layered universe where the fiction of Green Gables is used to frame the writings of actual little girls.) The real scenery of Cavendish, Prince Edward Island, is colonized for literary tourists. Visiting Green Gables at the age of 13, I felt foolish when I realized I was peering out of Anne's window to look for the light in Diana's window; not surprisingly, a girl who didn't exist was not lighting lamps to catch my attention. But evoking such a complex reaction, in an effort to blur all boundaries between geography and invention, is part of the mandate of the Green Gables museum, and these fuzzy edges are now part of the story of Anne.

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

> In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope (1981, 84).

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

> She opened her eyes and looked about her. They were on the crest of a hill. The sun had set some time since, but the landscape was still clear in the mellow afterlight. To the west a dark church spire rose up against a marigold sky. Below was a little valley, and beyond a long, gently rising slope with snug farmsteads scattered along it. From one to another the child's eyes darted, eager and wistful. At last they lingered on one away to the left, far back from the road, dimly white with blossoming trees in the twilight of the surrounding woods. Over it, in the stainless south-west sky, a great crystal-white star was shining like a lamp of guidance and promise.
>
> "That's it, isn't it?" she said, pointing (1992/1908, 24).

As so often with Montgomery, the space she describes is delineated by the time of day (most often sunset).

More rarely, to "thicken" the depiction of Avonlea life, Montgomery draws on historical connections. For example, Anne is reconciled with Diana and the Barrys after the drinking episode through the rescue of Minnie-May from a deadly case of croup.

Many of the women of Avonlea are away because the Prime Minister has come to Charlottetown.

> It was in January the Premier came, to address his loyal supporters and such of his non-supporters as chose to be present at the monster mass meeting held in Charlottetown. Most of the Avonlea people were on the Premier's side of politics; hence, on the night of the meeting nearly all the men and a goodly proportion of the women had gone to town, thirty miles away. Mrs Rachel Lynde had gone too. Mrs Rachel Lynde couldn't have believed that the political rally could be carried through without her, although she was on the opposite side of politics. So she went to town and took her husband – Thomas would be useful in looking after the horse – and Marilla Cuthbert with her. Marilla had a sneaking interest in politics herself, and as she thought it might be her only chance to see a real life Premier, she promptly took it, leaving Anne and Matthew to keep house until her return the following day (1992/1908, 117-118).

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

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

that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions (Bakhtin, 1981, 428).

Anne is adept at absorbing different voices into her own in ways specific to time and place. To take one example out of many possibilities, here is Anne expressing the community's concerns about the new minister.

> "I don't think Mr. Smith would have done, Matthew," was Anne's final summing up. "Mrs. Lynde says his delivery was so poor, but I think his worst fault was just like Mr. Bentley's – he had no imagination. And Mr. Terry had too much; he let it run away with him just as I did mine in the matter of the Haunted Wood. Besides, Mrs. Lynde says his theology wasn't sound. Mr. Gresham was a very good man and a very religious man, but he told too many funny stories and made the people laugh in church; he was undignified, and you must have some dignity about a minister, mustn't you, Matthew? I thought Mr. Marshall was decidedly attractive; but Mrs. Lynde says he isn't married, or even engaged, because she made special inquires about him, and she says it would never do to have a young unmarried minister in Avonlea, because he might marry in the congregation, and that would make trouble. Mrs. Lynde is a very far-seeing woman, isn't she, Matthew?" (1992/1908, 143)

This discussion is strongly of its place and time. Anne is transplanted into the social networks of Avonlea and takes root through many quotidian exchanges. It is perhaps not surprising that such an approach to creating a chronotope does not demarcate clear boundaries. Nobody expects to be part of every conversation in a social network; like pictures that bleed to the edges of the page suggesting a world beyond the confines of

the book, Montgomery's conversations suggest that there is more to Avonlea than (literally) meets the eye; its limits are uncertain.

Blurring boundaries

Border-blending occurs in many of the instantiations of Anne's world and of Montgomery's as well. One of the celebratory publications for the year of *Anne*'s centenary features exactly such blurring – but this mix of fact and fiction was created by Montgomery herself. A volume of her two Island Scrapbooks entitled *Imagining Anne* (Epperly, 2008) has been published to mark the anniversary year, acknowledging a partnership among "the Lucy Maud Montgomery Birthplace Trust; the Heirs of L.M. Montgomery, Inc.; the Confederation Centre Art Gallery and Museum (CCAGM); and the L.M. Montgomery Institute (LMMI)" (Epperly, 2008, 170). Under this thoroughly institutionalized aegis, the scrapbook presents Montgomery's highly composed and reworked version of the matrix of real life from which *Anne* was drawn. Reproducing many pages from her first two scrapbooks (the first covers the years 1893-1897 with some later additions; the second includes 1896-1903, again with some late notes), the published volume displays a mix of photographs, souvenirs, wedding notices, newspaper clippings, fashion images, commercial products such as floral namecards, and assorted other "scraps." Anyone who is puzzled by Anne's yearnings for puffed sleeves can find real-world referents for Montgomery's own passion for fashion. Photos of the original Lovers Lane in Cavendish jostle with literary effusions such as a clipping of "The Fringed Gentian" by Ellen Rodham Church and Augusta DeBubna (Epperly, 2008, 128), the poem so influential in the life of Emily of New Moon. The scrapbooks read like a

first pass at representing Cavendish life as a created chronotope. Montgomery reworked them over the course of her lifetime, removing some entries and pasting in others – just as she reworked the story of rural girlhood in Prince Edward Island over and over in her novels. To explore the scrapbooks after reading the novels is almost to watch Anne's fictional life bleed into the real world.

In 2008, it is also possible to watch Anne's life bleeding into other fictions, not just in print but in embodied corporate representations. The symbolic importance of Anne as national icon, even national cliché, is underlined by her appearance in the back story of the Maplelea Girls (the name is an amalgamation of maple leaves and Avonlea, and the dolls are created by a company named Avonlea Traditions, which initially developed to sell *Anne of Green Gables* dolls and keepsakes [http://www.maplelea.com/about_us.php?language=en, accessed March 13, 2008]) . The Maplelea Girls are dolls, clearly designed to offer Canadian complements and/or competition to the very successful American Girl dolls. True to Canadian form, they represent geographical regions rather than historical periods. One of the four dolls available in early 2008 is Jenna who introduces herself on the website in the following terms:

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

fun. (http://www.maplelea.com/product_info.php?cPath=43&products_id=30, accessed February 18, 2008)

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

> Jenna has just learned that she has won the leading role in her school's production of Anne of Green Gables. This is the costume she will wear as she plays Anne Shirley in the classic Canadian story that has been charming people around the world for almost a hundred years. The soft **corduroy pinafore** goes over the long sleeve **print dress**. On opening night she will clutch her **carpet bag** and hold on to her **straw hat** as she waits in eager anticipation for Matthew to pick her up at the train station. Highly detailed **old fashioned boots**, ribbed brown **tights**, green **hair ribbons** and, of course, the necessary **bloomers** complete her costume. Includes **journal pages** and a Maplelea **hanger**. (http://www.maplelea.com/product_info.php?cPath=43&products_id=425, accessed February 18, 2008, emphasis in original)

When you buy this costume, you buy into a complexly layered fantasy: the doll is real but Jenna's personality and backstory are fictional, outlined in considerable detail in the diary that comes with the doll. The costume is tangible too, but it represents the point where one fictional character assumes the role of a second fictional character with different creative and historical roots. To underline the shift in proprietary relations, a postscript to the sales blurb above earnestly explains who owns what:

ANNE OF GREEN GABLES IS A TRADEMARK AND A CANADIAN OFFICIAL MARK OF THE ANNE OF GREEN GABLES LICENSING aUTHORITY, USED UNDER LICENSE BY AVONLEA TRADITIONS iNC. MAPLELEA GIRLS AND JENNA McALLISTER AND ALL RELATED INDICIA ARE TRADEMARKS OF AVONLEA TRADITIONS INC. (http://www.maplelea.com/product_info.php?cPath=43&products_id=425, accessed February 18, 2008, capitalization as in original)

Jenna costs just under $100, and the "Anne" costume costs another $50. For a further $50, you can also acquire an old-fashioned school desk, "a miniature replica of what was actually used in Canadian classrooms in the 1800s. Made of wood and metal." (http://www.maplelea.com/product_info.php?cPath=43&products_id=419, accessed February 18, 2008) The picture for this desk includes an image of Jenna dressed up as Anne but the desk itself is referenced to the real world of Canadian children in the 1800s. The desk comes with a note explaining that it is "perfect for displaying dolls and teddy bears, or for gentle play" (not quite so perfect for displaying Jenna/Anne, as the doll's stiff legs and arms make it awkward to seat her convincingly at the desk).

The "journal pages" that come with every purchase encourage young buyers to write themselves into a personal space that offers some complex mix of their own lives and their imaginative involvement with the universe of the Maplelea dolls. Jenna herself has "written" an account of her own life in the diary that comes with the doll, mixing drawings of her doll face with photographs of Lunenberg (McAllister, 2007, 12-13), where she purports to live, and of Jenna's soccer team (15), in yet another sleight of modality. "I love the Anne character," Jenna writes in her diary, "because even though

she is forever getting herself into predicaments, she always looks on the bright side of things. As Anne says, 'Tomorrow is a new day with no mistakes in it yet'" (insert for McAllister, 2007, n.p.)

Confused yet? Pinning down Anne of Green Gables, a hundred years after her first appearance in print, does seem to involve a great deal of ontological border crossing. Another anniversary celebration involves the publication of a prequel, *Before Green Gables* by Budge Wilson (2008), which was enough of a national event that large sections were serialized in my local daily newspaper. Wilson creates 443 pages of new life for Anne, all ending happily with her arrival in Bright River to be adopted by Matthew and Marilla. What is the status of this story? The dust jacket assures us that the book has been "fully authorized by the heirs of L.M. Montgomery," but does that imprimatur make it any more than hardcover fan fiction? Anne was created as a child whose background is riddled with gaps; will infilling those gaps with a new story change how we experience the old one?

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

Being a "classic" of children's literature today (at least one that is out of copyright) does seem to entail being open to evisceration, as publishers, producers, and manufacturers look for the nub of what made the work so popular in the first place and attempt to reproduce that appeal in ways that will sell anew. *Anne of Green Gables*, as one of a tiny number of Canadian children's classics, is often wrapped in the flag for extra consumer appeal. Alternatively it is wrapped in a fuzzy blanket of nostalgia for the days of wholesome innocence. The irony of requiring contemporary innocence to be vouched for by a fingerprint reader before young fans may enter the zone of virtue and purity that the world of *Anne* takes for granted is too disturbing to be entirely funny.

Reading *Anne*

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

Montgomery's books were almost the only Canadian literature I read as a child, and I felt particular bonds with Anne. In part, these links arose from the fact that *Anne* was my first Montgomery book. I galloped through the whole book in a single March day in 1958 when I was nine years old and sick in bed. By the end of the day, I knew I had irrevocably changed as a reader and a book that does that to you is one that you don't forget. It was the most complex book I had ever read; it evoked more real emotion than any other story I had known up to that point. And in a few small ways it actually made

room for me, Margaret – like Anne, born in Nova Scotia; like Anne, moving as a young child to a nearby island; though in my case it was to Newfoundland and I was a year old, too young to remember living elsewhere.

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

In some ways, the doll Jenna playing Anne of Green Gables in the school play provides an analogy for my relationship with Anne. I was tangentially connected rather than completely identified with Anne. I had to put on a costume to make it work, the garb of a little Nova Scotia girl. It was an identity that normally meant little to me, but the costume fit me and fit me into the story. I could make many effortless connections.

Another little girl read *Anne of Green Gables* for the first time when she was nine years old, and this child grew up to write very interestingly about that experience. Adrienne Clarkson, who served as Governor-General of Canada between 1999 and 2005, arrived in Canada as an immigrant from Hong Kong at the age of six. Famously, she

learned about Canada from *Anne of Green Gables*, and she has written eloquently of its power and appeal.

> L.M. Montgomery in all her books gave me a profound understanding of what Canada is. Through the particularity and peculiarities of Prince Edward Island and these girls' fictional lives, I became a Canadian. . . .L.M. Montgomery's world gave me an extended family that taught me about the rivalries of Tory and Grit, Protestant and Catholic, in a highly sophisticated microcosmic way; it was a background, a heritage that I gained literarily and that made my becoming Canadian very easy and attractive. Anne and Emily, the Story Girl, and all the others were my cousins of the imagination and the spirit, and so what they were I became also. . . .
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> [F]or me, the immigrant child, the world of the Cuthberts, the Lyndes, and the Barrys was the world of Canada – rural, rooted, and white – a world to which I would never have had access any other way. . . . [T]he depth of understanding, the texture of generations of feuds and forgettings, the nature of the Scots-Irish Presbyterianism, constituted a reality that only fiction could convey. Only fiction can bring the truth because only fiction is not unbelievable. (1999, ix-x)

I was close to but not entirely inside the particularities of Anne's world; Clarkson assumed those particularities perhaps as a different kind of costume – but one that seems to have fit equally well for her imaginative and national purposes. My contiguity was geographic and social; Clarkson's was more experiential and psychological:

> Being orphaned or losing a parent, which is such a Montgomery theme, was correlated in my mind to my experience as a refugee, arriving in Canada with my

> parents and one suitcase each. So when Anne is found by Matthew on the railway siding, sitting on her suitcase, to me that wasn't a fictional situation. That was my situation. And Matthew and Marilla were like the safe haven that Canada was for me. In many ways they represent Canadians at their most characteristic – repressed, silent, and strictured, but decent, open-hearted, and capable of adapting to circumstances. They were a traditional bachelor and spinster, and suddenly they became parents, they became loved by someone outside of their "family." If that isn't a metaphor for Canada as a country that receives immigrants, I don't know what is! (1999, x)

As young readers, Clarkson and I were learning about reading a chronotope, among many other lessons. Drawing on our life experience and such literary knowledge as we then possessed, we established ways of observing the thickening of time, the charging of space, and made meaning of it for ourselves.

Feuds and forgettings

Clarkson's line about the feuds and forgettings sums up one of the major qualities of Montgomery's original stories, a quality that has been subverted for capitalistic purposes in some of the spin-off materials of the 21st century. Montgomery cast a sharp yet benevolent eye on the idiosyncrasies and peculiarities of the people she wanted to see, but she was also adept at *not seeing*, of omitting from the fabric of Island life any element that didn't fit her accounts of the insiders of village life. The French are permitted to make occasional appearances, usually as hired boys and usually to be denigrated as part of the price of appearing at all. Marilla, for example, explaining to Mrs. Lynde why they

want to adopt a boy to help Matthew, says, "There's never anybody to be had but those stupid half-grown little French boys, and as soon as you do get one broke into your ways and taught something he's up and off to the lobster canneries or the States" (1992/1908, 11). The Mic'maq people have but one role: to donate the poetic name of Abegweit to the Island and then to vanish from even the fringes of the story. The African-Canadian population of Charlottetown, who inhabited the area known as the Bog during Montgomery's time, is not granted even that vestigial role in any of the stories. The consequence is a White fable of settlement and complacency.

Reading that White fable in Newfoundland in the late 1950s, I had no social experience with which to question Montgomery's forgettings. The Avalon Peninsula, to all intents and purposes, *was* the all-White society of Montgomery's imagining. The Beothuk, Newfoundland's indigenous people, were wiped out in the 19th century and existed only vaguely in my consciousness in the twinned forms of history lessons at school and displays of skeletons and artefacts at the provincial museum. I have one strangely random memory from my early childhood of a Black face underneath a turban suddenly looking out of a front door on Pennywell Road where I lived – but I have never been able to establish whether this astonishing event really happened or if I dreamed it with the aid of Aunt Jemima on the pancake box. In general, the faces I saw were exclusively White.

For many years I had no reason to question the harmony between Montgomery's all-White world and my own. For many years after I moved away from Newfoundland, it must be admitted, I didn't even think very much about *Anne of Green Gables* at all. But a publishing event that occurred very close to the centennial celebrations for *Anne* gave

me a new background for thinking about Montgomery's books. Like *Before Green Gables,* it offers to infill some of the gaps in the background of *Anne of Green Gables*. Unlike Wilson's book, it sheds light on gaps in the story we are actively told, rather than on what happened before the story started. By throwing these absences into relief, this book highlights a new idea of Canada, and creates a different chronotope of an equivalent time and space in 19th century Canada.

Elijah of Buxton

Elijah of Buxton (2007) by Christopher Paul Curtis was published in the fall of 2007, just missing *Anne*'s centenary by a few months. Like Anne, Elijah is eleven years old at the start of the book and is marked as special in his community, though while Anne is an outsider to Avonlea, Elijah is a particularly special kind of insider in Buxton: the first free-born child in a community of escaped and freed slaves. Like Avonlea, Buxton is firmly based on a real place, although Curtis does not go through the formality of changing the community's name as Montgomery did with Cavendish. Curtis has overlaid his story on a real village that already housed its own museum to testify to its historical significance, while the Green Gables industry in Prince Edward Island overlaid the museums on a fictional community – but the ontological fuzziness of the geography-fiction boundary is important in both cases.

Elijah of Buxton also tells a significant national story. The historical truths and mythologies of the Underground Railway to Canada are well established in Canadian culture and Curtis's story certainly testifies to the role of Canada as sanctuary for

African-Americans. He supplies an account of daily life in a Canadian village that is in many ways very different from Avonlea.

The historical documentation that surrounds Curtis's fiction also tells a very interesting story. Elijah talks about the day that the school children were organized by race to return home. Children were singled out by name and sent home in specific groups and Elijah comments, "I knowed there was only one reason why they'd let the white children and the Indian children leave without no one watching 'em. I said, 'Pa, there's slave catchers here, ain't there?'" (2007, 58) The integrated school implied in this scene is indeed a matter of historical record. Shannon Prince, curator of the Buxton Museum tells the story:

> It was, in fact education that helped bring down the barriers that divided the races. Shortly after arriving here in 1849, Reverend King and a delegation of mixed race found the doors of the district school locked to them. They then built their own log schoolhouse on Rev. King's farm. After it was completed word came from Chatham that a mob would come to prevent it from opening. Armed supporters hid in the surrounding forest to prevent this. The school opened with 14 black and 2 white children. . . . The quality of the education at Buxton became so renowned that within a year there were more white children in this school than in the district school. Soon the parents of the remainder of the students asked permission to enroll their children. The District school was forced to close and Buxton became the only common school in the township. The friendships and understanding were increasing and many of the old settlers who had signed the petition against the settlement asked that their names be stricken from the paper

(http://www.buxtonmuseum.com/Previous/evolution_of_race_relations.html, accessed March 2, 2008).

This inter-racial school offers a very different scenario from the White world of Montgomery's Prince Edward Island – but I was fascinated to discover that Montgomery might have drawn on a similar example of integrated education right in her own territory. Anne went to Queen's in Charlottetown and studied to be a teacher, indeed set her heart on being a progressive teacher – but she paid no heed to a progressive example from the Bog, the Black neighbourhood inside the boundaries of Charlottetown:

> In the Bog, on Rochford Street, was an integrated school for the underprivileged. On Prince Edward Island in the 19th century, the gulf between the rich and the lower classes was enormous. Nowhere was this more obvious than in the Bog area of Charlottetown where many Black Islanders lived. For over fifty years in the Bog School (1848 - 1903) Sarah Harvie, trained more than two thousand children. Sarah, who was African Canadian, was highly respected for the positive influence she exerted on the locality. . . . Some protested the fact that children of "respectable parents" were sending their children to Sarah Harvie to benefit from her progressive teaching (Flynn-Burhoe, 1997, n.p.)

"Queen's" is the name Montgomery gave to Prince of Wales College in Charlottetown, which she herself had attended. By one of those accidents of colonial nomenclature, my own school in St. John's was also Prince of Wales College, another of those subliminal links. From the windows of my own PWC, I looked down the hill to the harbour, over streets full of all-White residents. It was not until I read *Elijah of Buxton* that it occurred to me even to *wonder* if Charlottetown was quite so monolithic. It took

just moments on the Internet to establish the existence of the Bog, raising the question of whether Montgomery was herself ignorant of its existence or whether she chose (actively or subconsciously) to bleach her story of any non-White ingredients.

Whatever the case, my reading of *Anne of Green Gables* has irrevocably altered in spite of my precautions with Budge Wilson's book. I now see gaps that I never noticed before. For all the persuasive invocation of the details of Avonlea life, the chronotope is selective. However we may excoriate the sanitized commodification of *Anne's Diary*, the doll Jenna's role-play, and Kevin Sullivan's saccharine clean-up of Avonlea, the first bucket of whitewash was supplied by Montgomery herself.

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

Nevertheless, the chronotope of Buxton creates many questions about Montgomery's Prince Edward Island, and about the kinds of national reading that have sustained Montgomery's works for a century.

Understanding the "inside"

Anne was an outsider who knew she was an outsider. Elijah was a "special" insider, but paradoxically his status as freeborn made him an "outsider" to the shared experiences of most of the rest of his community. It is clear from the story that he truly did not understand the experience of slavery until he sneaked into the United States – but that experience marked all the adults in his community in ways that he could not understand.

My own experience was not so traumatic but it was distinctive. In real life, as a child reader, I was an outside observer of a particular and unique confluence of time and space in my own class at school. My classmates, born in 1948, represented the last cohort of native Newfoundlanders; the children in the class behind us were born as Canadians. So was I, of course, and my classmates, who were fiercely proud of their own place in history, perceived my outsider status. When I moved to Edmonton at the age of 13, I was still an outsider; the paths between Newfoundland and Alberta were nowhere near so well-trodden in 1962, and Newfoundlanders were rare in Edmonton.

But in more complex ways, what I learned about my country from reading *Anne of Green Gables* paradoxically placed me more in Elijah's state: an insider who knew too little of the community (in this case, Canada) to which she belonged. The lacunae in Montgomery's work helped to shape my social and cultural perceptions of my homeland as a place entirely composed of people who looked like me. I knew and saw nothing of the African-Canadian communities of Nova Scotia, nor of the members of the First and Métis Nations in Alberta, even though I had connections to both provinces. Such

obliviousness was widespread in the 1950s and 1960s, and Montgomery is not the only author whose works created an all-White Canadian world.

It is disturbing, however, in the 21st century to turn to the commodified versions of *Anne* and find them also largely monocultural. *Anne's Diary* is heavy into pink, with red-haired Anne the only face on offer. The Maplelea dolls offer a sop to multiculturalism; one doll, Alexi, is vaguely coffee-coloured. But Alexi's identity is blandly urban (she lives in trendy Toronto!) and she is as shallow and fashion-obsessed as any other character in this world. The didactic stereotypes that inhabit Kevin Sullivan's "educational" Annetoon website, linked to his animations, are all-White and relentlessly boring (the "activities" associated with the head-lice cartoon involve talking about communicable diseases and cleaning up the classroom toys (http://www.annetoon.com/EducatorsGuides/AnimatedTeachersGuideEpisode07.pdf, accessed March 13, 2008).

Whatever sins against plurality Montgomery may have committed, consciously or otherwise, in creating the fictional universe of Avonlea have surely been punished far beyond the scale of the original crime in this inexorable evacuation of meaning and interest from her creation as it mutates into these commercial products.

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

But the antidote to this ongoing evisceration of an already edited world is not to abandon *Anne of Green Gables* as commercially polluted beyond redemption. Christine Jenkins, addressing the National Reading Conference (Wolf *et al*., 2007), spoke of the power of placing books side by side and considering how they talk to each other. When *Anne of Green Gables* and *Elijah of Buxton* are placed together, a new, broader and more exciting chronotope of nineteenth-century Canada emerges. The repressed Presbyterians of Avonlea provide interesting ground when Elijah serves as figure; the background of Buxton throws the principles of localized decency and kindness that govern Avonlea life into high relief. For a child reader to learn that the country which produced Avonlea could also support, or at least tolerate Buxton – and that the country which made room for Buxton also gave rise to the contradictions of Avonlea – is educational in the best sense of the word.

I will give the last word to Margaret the reader. I have completely lost track of how many times I have read *Anne of Green Gables* in the past fifty years – enough times that the book had few surprises to offer me. Reading *Elijah of Buxton* sent me back to *Anne* with revitalized eyes. The simple act of finding out about the multicultural elements of Charlottetown in the 19th century has estranged and refreshed a text that I was close to being able to recite, and given me a new sense of Canada as a home for the plural, however much its national icon attempts to render it singular. Read separately, both Avonlea and Buxton are romanticized in these children's stories, but set side by side they query each other in instructive ways.

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