

Irene Gammel and Elizabeth Epperly, eds.
L.M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture.
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 1999. Pp. 267.



No greater illustration of the curious gap between scholarly interest and canonical integration comes to mind than the case of L.M. Montgomery and her work. The past few decades saw expression of scholarly interest in Montgomery, and it took many forms: myriad journal articles; multiple biographies of the writer, feminist studies of her heroines, annotated editions of her centre-piece novel, edited collections of her letters, and essays on her journals; and the creation of the L.M. Montgomery Institute at the University of Prince Edward Island (which has hosted international symposia, from one of which *L.M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture* had its genesis). Nevertheless, Montgomery's oeuvre has remained (despite its perennial populist appeal) nearly absent from the Canadian literary canon.

Its editors offer this collection of twenty articles as a reconceptualization—"the first systematic effort to investigate the question of the Canadianness of Montgomery's writing" (4)—and an interrogation of and a corrective to the exclusion of Canadian children's writing from literary anthologies aimed at the university market, and the dismissal of popular literature in official school curricula. The remedial powers of the collection can only be measured in due time. Already we know this lively and comprehensive volume will prove an invaluable resource for Canadianists.

Although the great majority of the contributors are Canadian academics, the editors have eschewed a monolithic approach by engaging scholars from many disciplines—women's studies, Canadian studies, history, children's literature, and Canadian literature, among others—who deploy varied critical strategies. Such well-known Canadian writers as Frank Davey and Carole Gerson are joined by a handful of international scholars, including Yoskiko Akamatsu of Japan and Theodore Sheckels of the United States. The few non-academic contributors, notably Adrienne Clarkson and Margaret Atwood, provide further textual variegation.

The collection is organized into three major categories (each of which is bifurcated). The time frame of the first two sections is contemporaneous with Montgomery's writing: Part One examines Montgomery as a shaper of national and regional identity and the nation as an agent of construction of Montgomery and her work; Part Two considers her life and work in the context of the momentous social and institutional changes to mid-century. Part Three, on Anne Shirley's evolution to icon and commodity, extends the study to the end of the century. The inclusion of a chronology of Montgomery's life and work would have complemented this otherwise deft editorial assemblage.

Several contributors posit a sisterhood of literary lineage. Gammel and Epperly mention Margaret Atwood's and Alice Munro's indebtedness to Montgomery, a note upon which Frank Davey expands (and to which he adds Margaret Laurence and Daphne Marlatt). In the work of each, he observes, is "a mismatch between the possible dreams of women and the opportunities society would allow them." (164) Theodore Sheckel places Montgomery at the origin of a line of writers—including Atwood, Laurence, Munro, and Marian Engel—who "subvert the master's discourse." (189) Margaret Atwood, the ubiquitous icon herself, constructs a genealogy for *Anne of Green Gables* that springs from *Jane Eyre*. All of this is worthy, but given the editors' avowed purpose, some examination of Montgomery's Canadian literary antecedents would also have been fitting. Surely the sisters Moodie and Trill, to name but two, invite comparison.

That *L.M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture* pays most attention to the author's Anne series is predictable, given the iconographic status of the character. Fortunately, the book also deals with *A Tangled Web*, *Rilla of Ingleside*, *The Blue Castle*, and *Jane of Lantern Hill*, and Montgomery's poems and journals. Sasha Mullally's discussion of the automobile in *The Blue Castle* as signifying "the jolt of modernity to the values and strictures of Victorian society" (121) is especially engaging when it extends to an investigation of early opposition to the car in rural Canada in general and Prince Edward Island in particular and peruses, along the way, Montgomery's own ambivalence toward technology. With its concomitant overview of the rise of domestic sciences at universities, Roberta Buchanan's reading of the writer's journals as sites of inquest into "the power politics of the home" (153) is of more than passing interest to the educator.

Especially absorbing are two investigations of literary production. Carole Gerson frames exploration of Montgomery's lengthy, troubled relationship with her American publisher, L.C. Page, around literary

product as commodity, specifically the popularity of serials among early twentieth-century audiences of children's literature. Gerson poses a provocative question about *Anne of Green Gables*: "Was it a text originally envisioned as closed and complete?" (55) E. Holly Pike examines embryonic canon formation, arguing convincingly that the canon emerged from a debate between the realist-idealists and the modernists in the 1920s and that Montgomery's subsequent marginalization was a consequence of her entrenchment in the former camp.

If Montgomery had bad luck in the Canadian canon, quite the opposite was the case in Japan where, according to Yoshiko Akamatsu, her work has benefited from official government policy, dating to the late nineteenth century, of Westernization in education. Since its translation into Japanese and publication in 1952, *Anne of Green Gables* has never been out of print, and its sequels have enjoyed similar popularity. Anne stories appear in numerous textbooks, and, by the 1990s, several English textbooks (abridged, for the most part) of *Anne of Green Gables* with Japanese notes entered the post-secondary course adoption market. Akamatsu attributes the solidification of Anne's status—in academic and popular domains—to a complex intersection of social and cultural factors, including highly "feminine" translations, the privileged status of the teaching profession, the reading of Anne's loquaciousness as a sign of democracy, and the character's adaptability to animation.

In their wide-ranging approach to Montgomery's attitudes toward schooling, Gammel and Ann Dutton examine the schoolteacher figure in her fiction, the writer's own teaching experience, the impact of contemporary educational theorists Jean Piaget and Maria Montessori on her philosophy of education, and the real-life models for such teacher characters as Miss Stacey in *Anne of Green Gables*. There is an instructive overview of Victorian Prince Edward Island education; details of, for example, teachers' salary and working conditions and the corporal punishment debate, will please educational historians.

Gammel and Epperly's provident cross-disciplinary selection process assures sufficient divergence in critical approach to satisfy a broad scholarly audience. Contributors' acknowledgement of discourse engagement is a further asset, and discussions of the ideas of their collaborators add potency to the collection. *L.M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture* is a significant addition to Montgomery scholarship.

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